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Sugiyama et al.

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(54) **MICRO LENS ARRAY AND A METHOD OF MANUFACTURING A REPLICATION MOLD FOR THE SAME**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

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Dec. 16, 2004 (JP) P2004-364962

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G02B 6/32 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **385/33**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** None
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The micro-lens array in which a plural of convexly-protruded micro-lens are closely arranged two-dimensionally and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a curvature-radius smaller than that of the micro-lens are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro-lens has a large view angle, since D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3 where D is the micro-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the micro-lens; D_s is the sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens; and D_{sav} is the average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s .

2 Claims, 16 Drawing Sheets

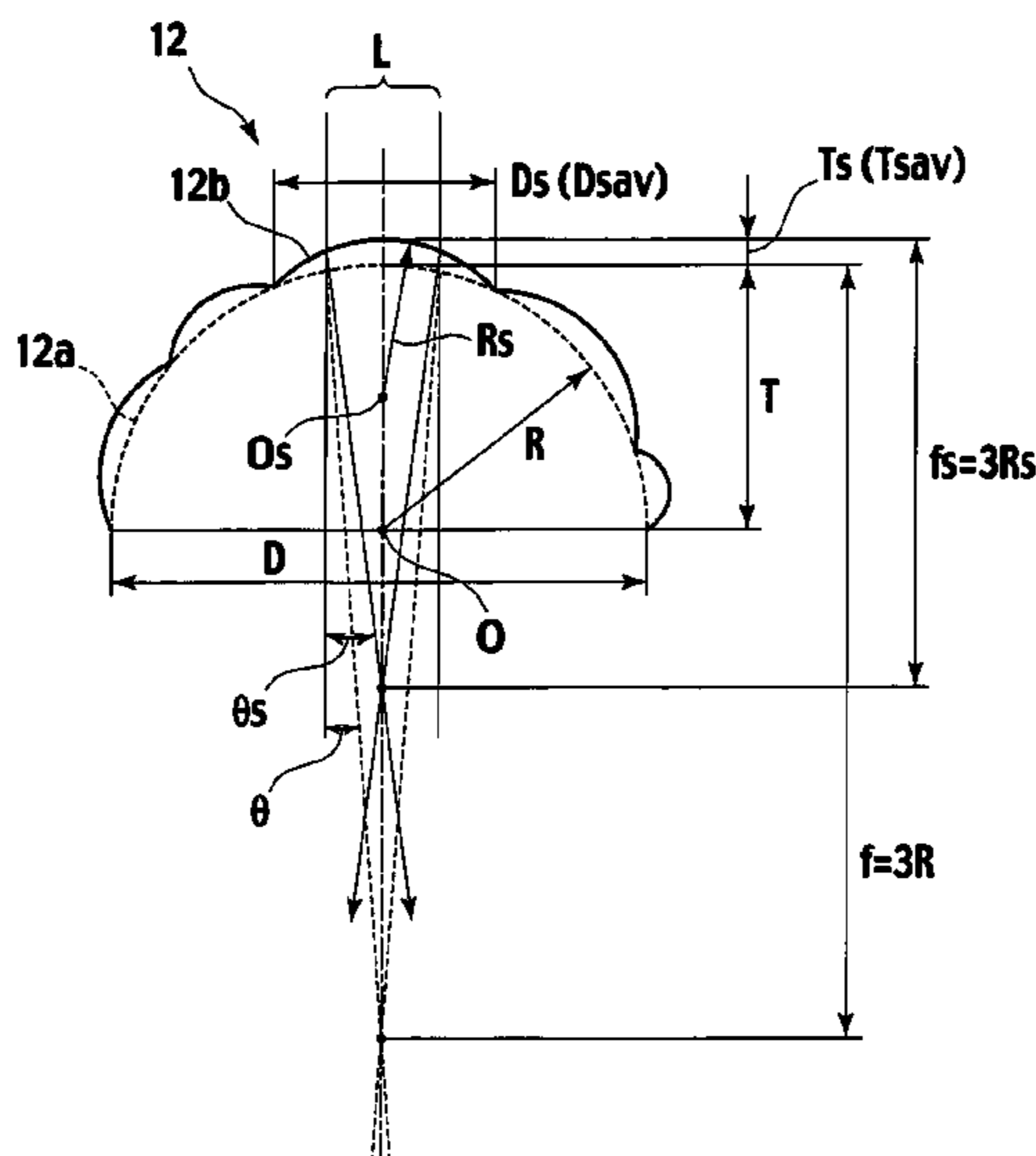


FIG. 1A
RELATED ART

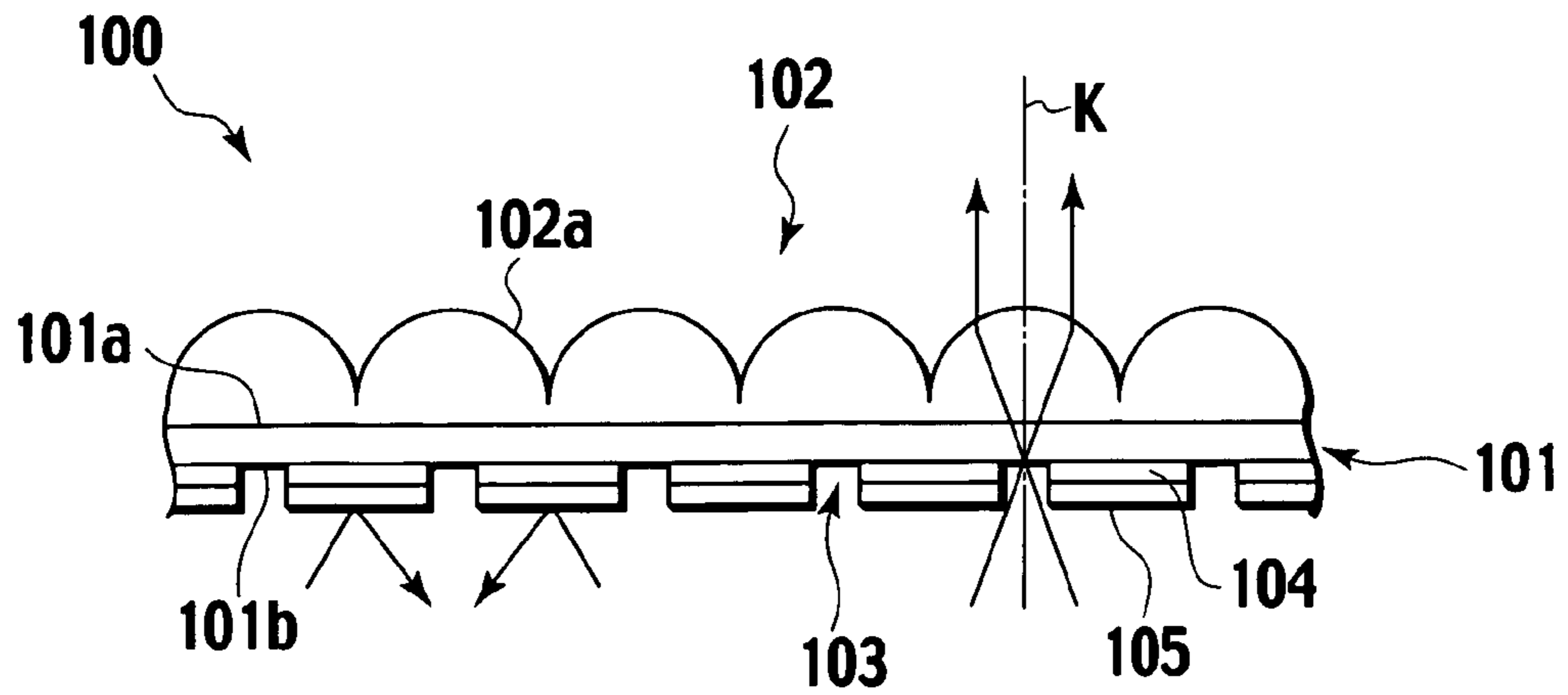


FIG. 1B
RELATED ART

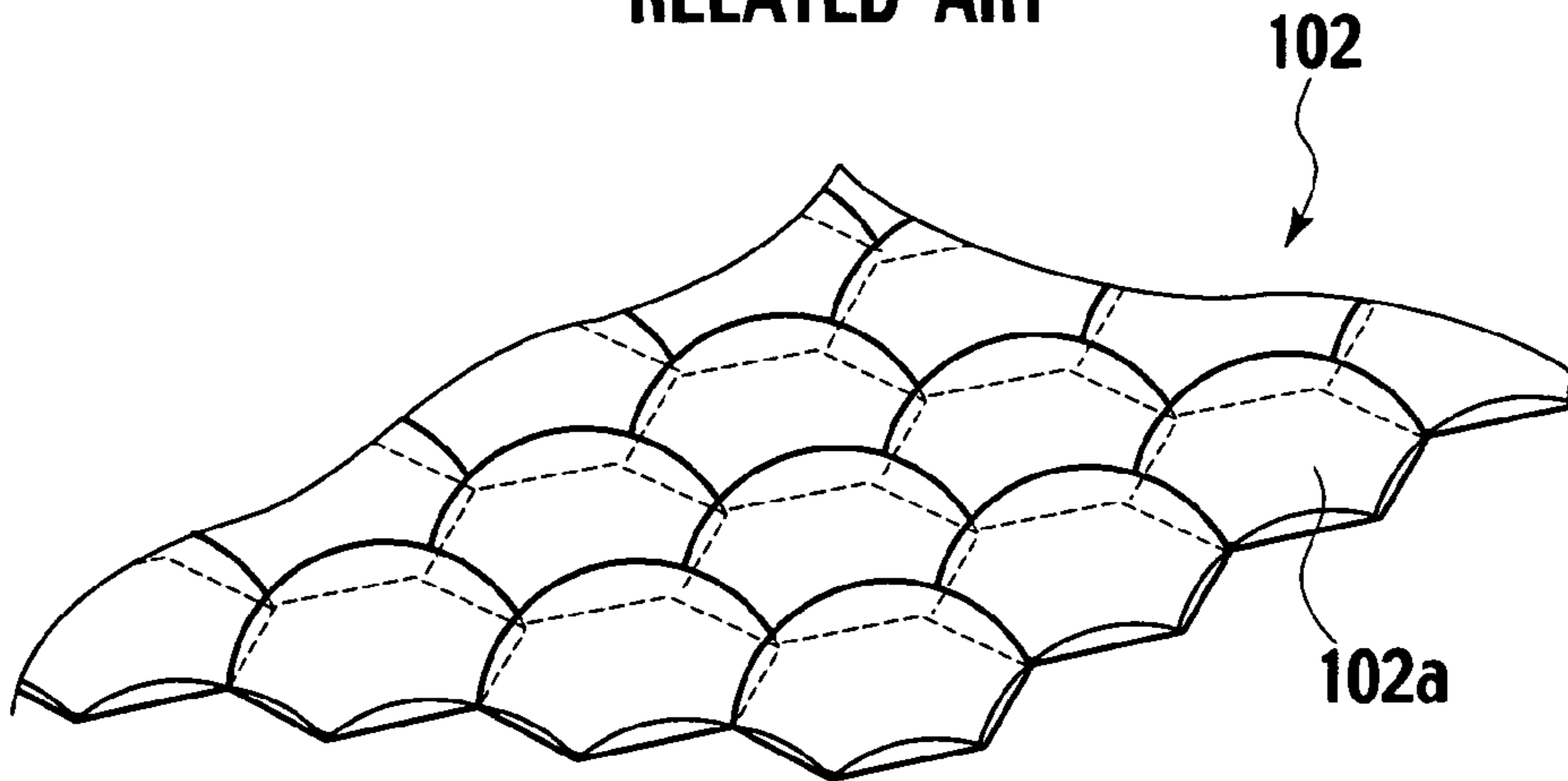


FIG. 1C
RELATED ART

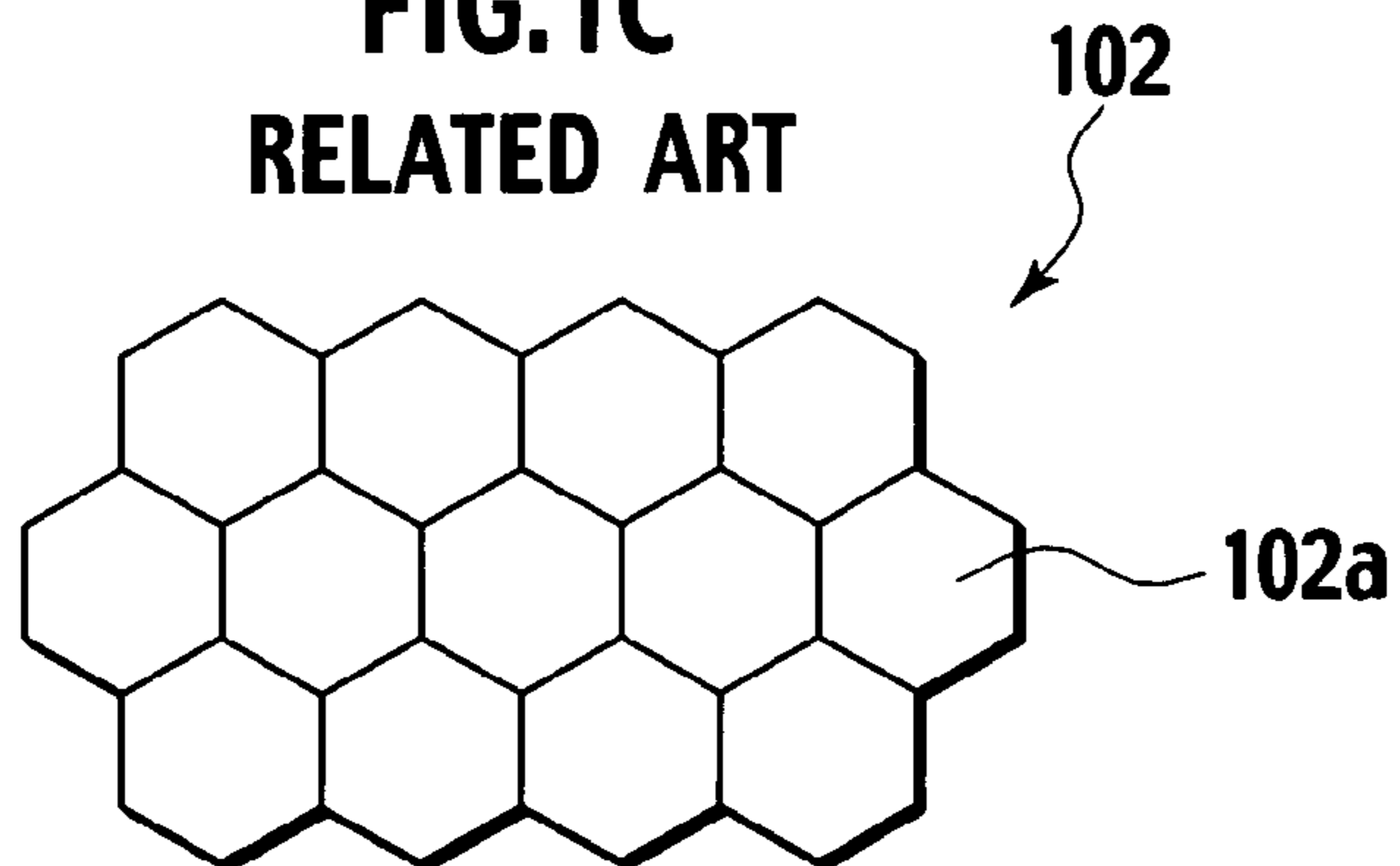


FIG.2A
RELATED ART

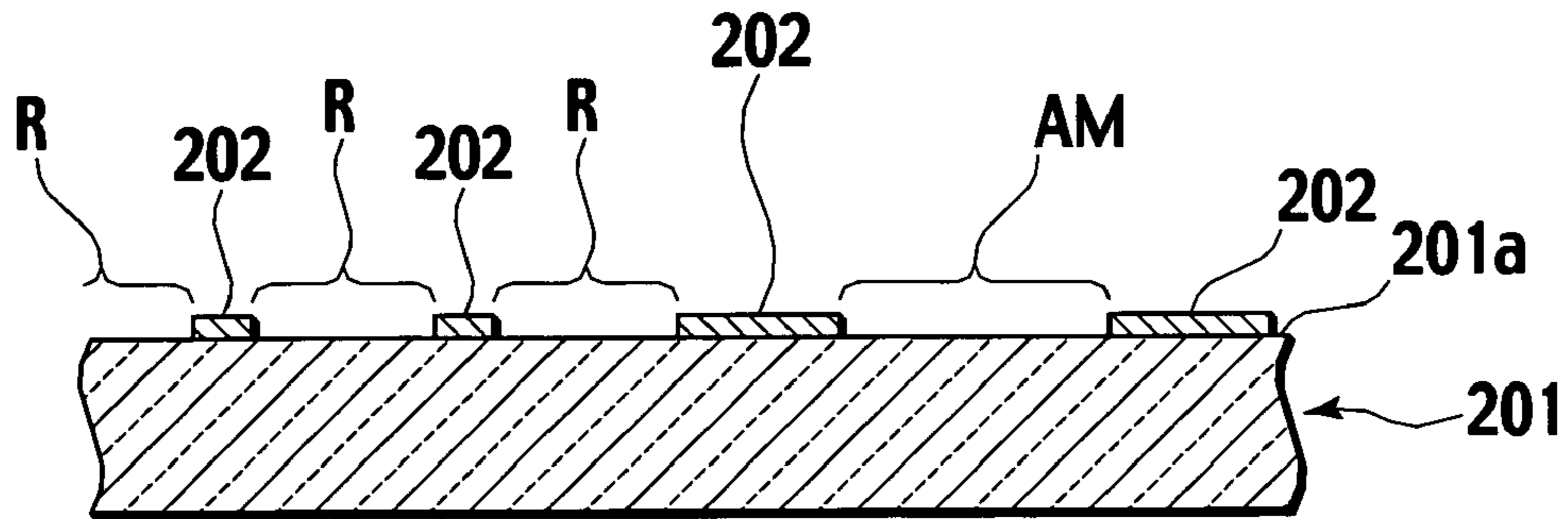


FIG.2B
RELATED ART

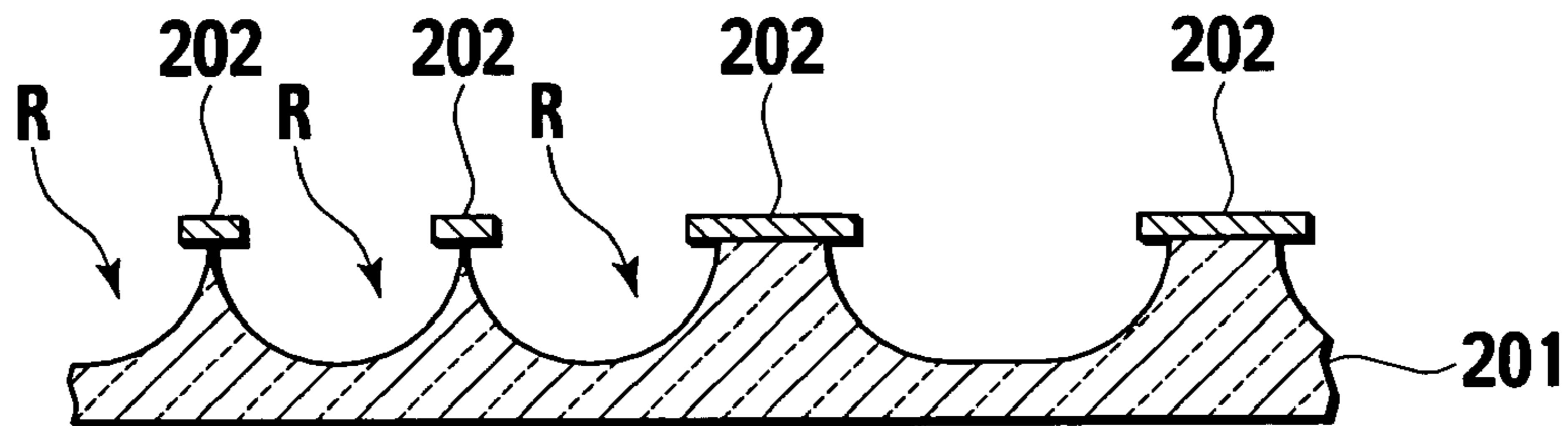


FIG.2C
RELATED ART

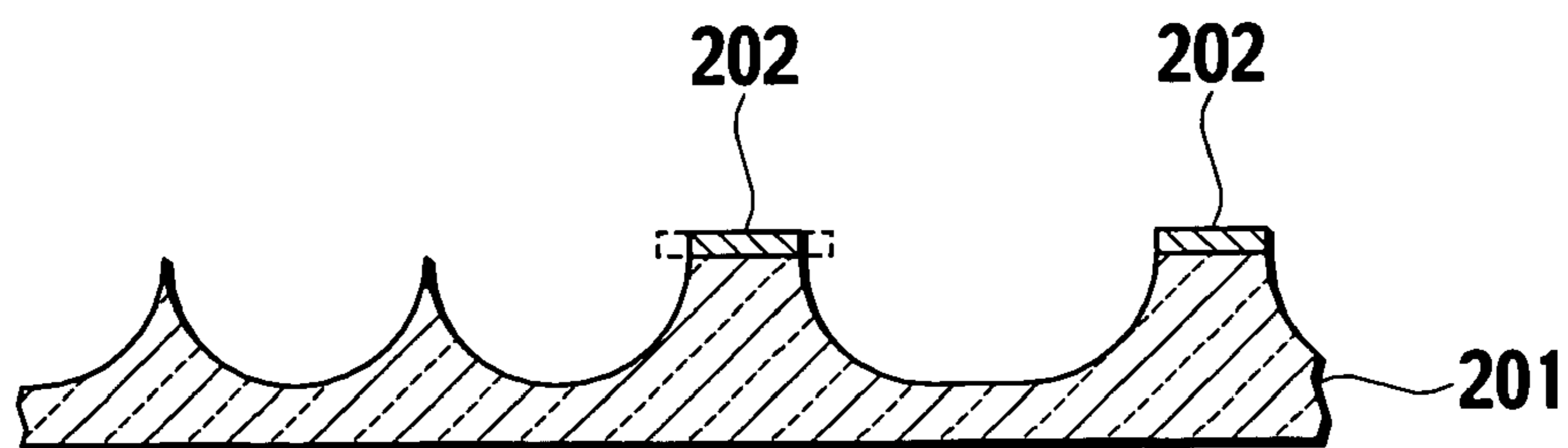


FIG.3A

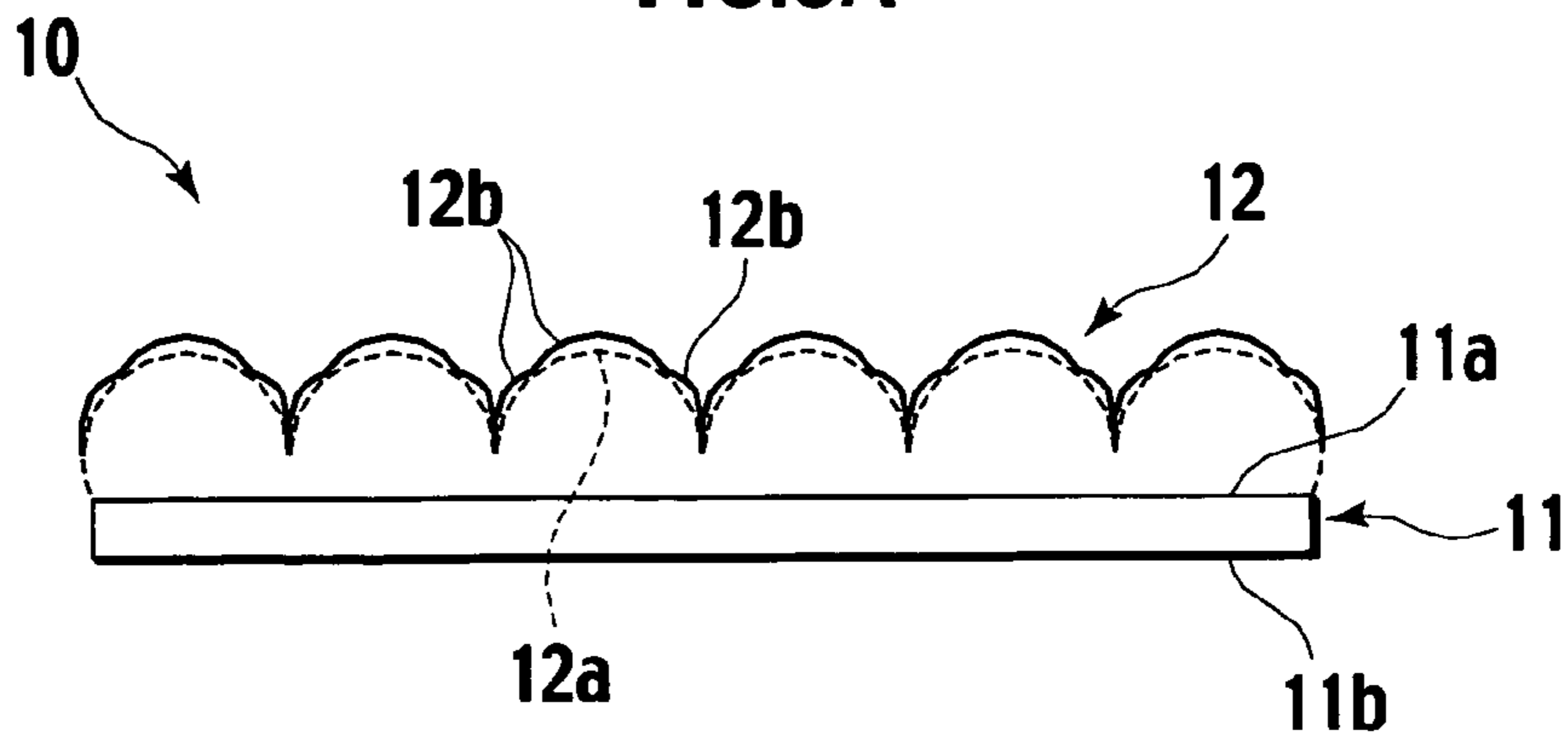


FIG.3B

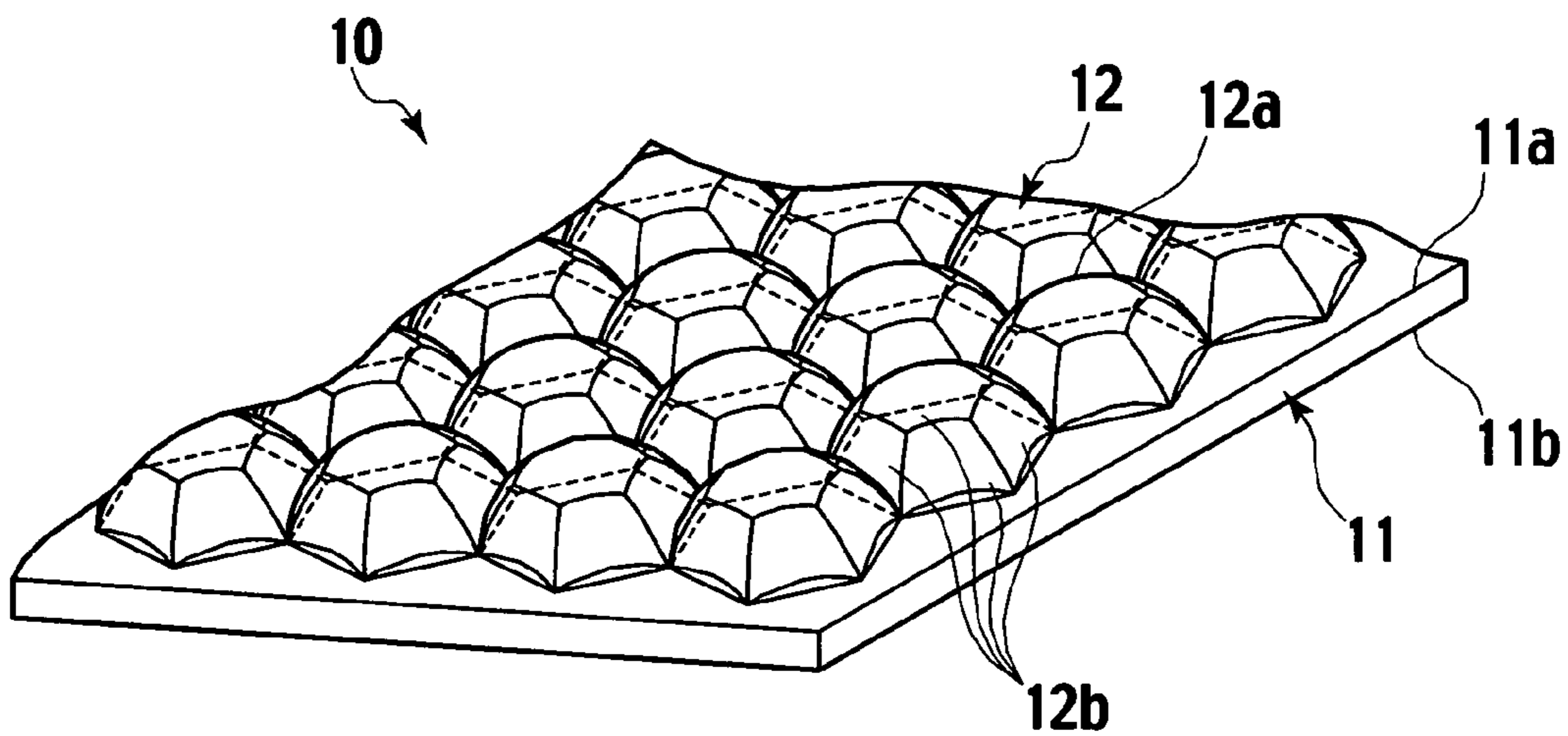


FIG.3C

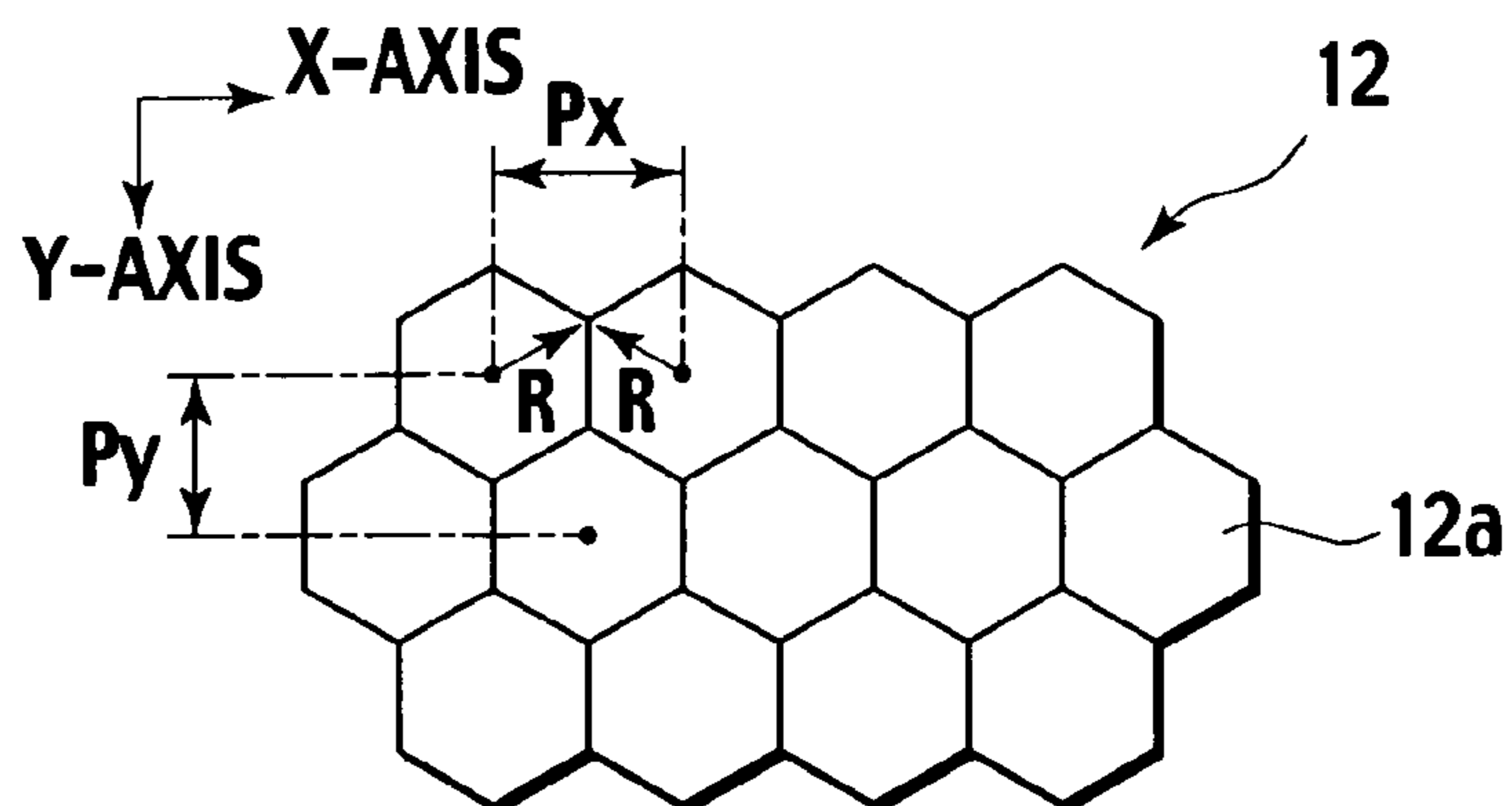


FIG.4

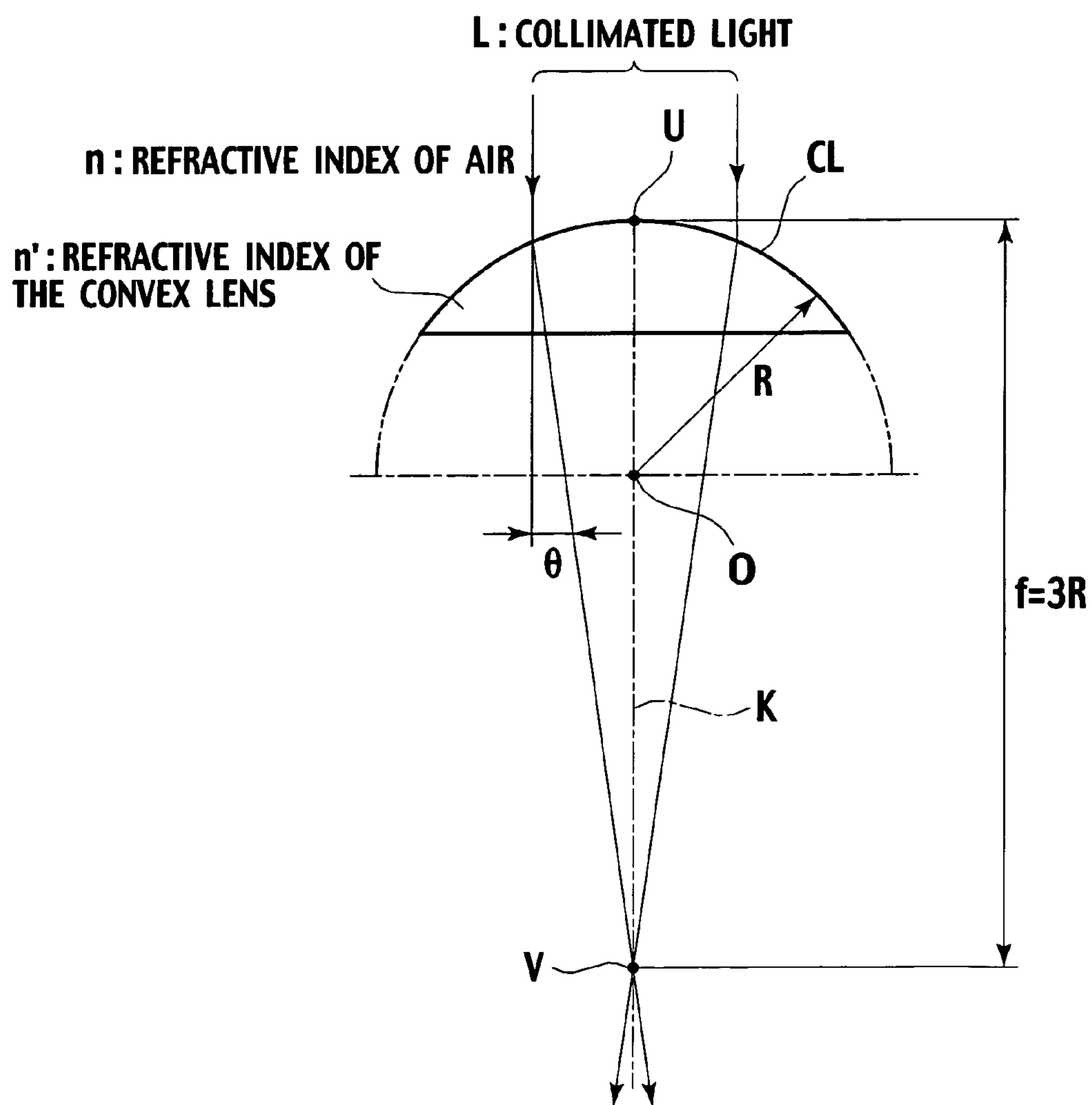


FIG.5

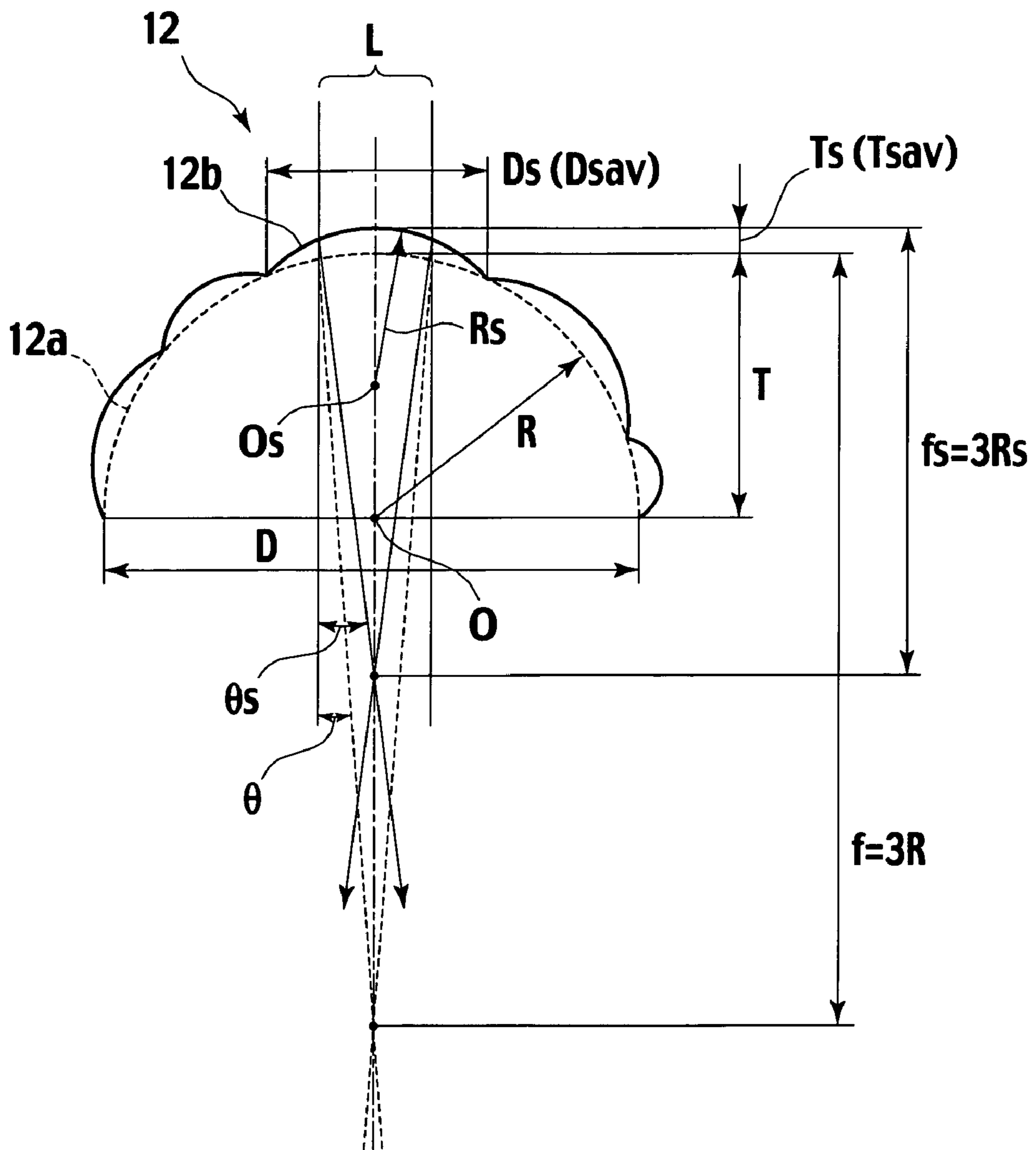


FIG.6A

D=90 μ m

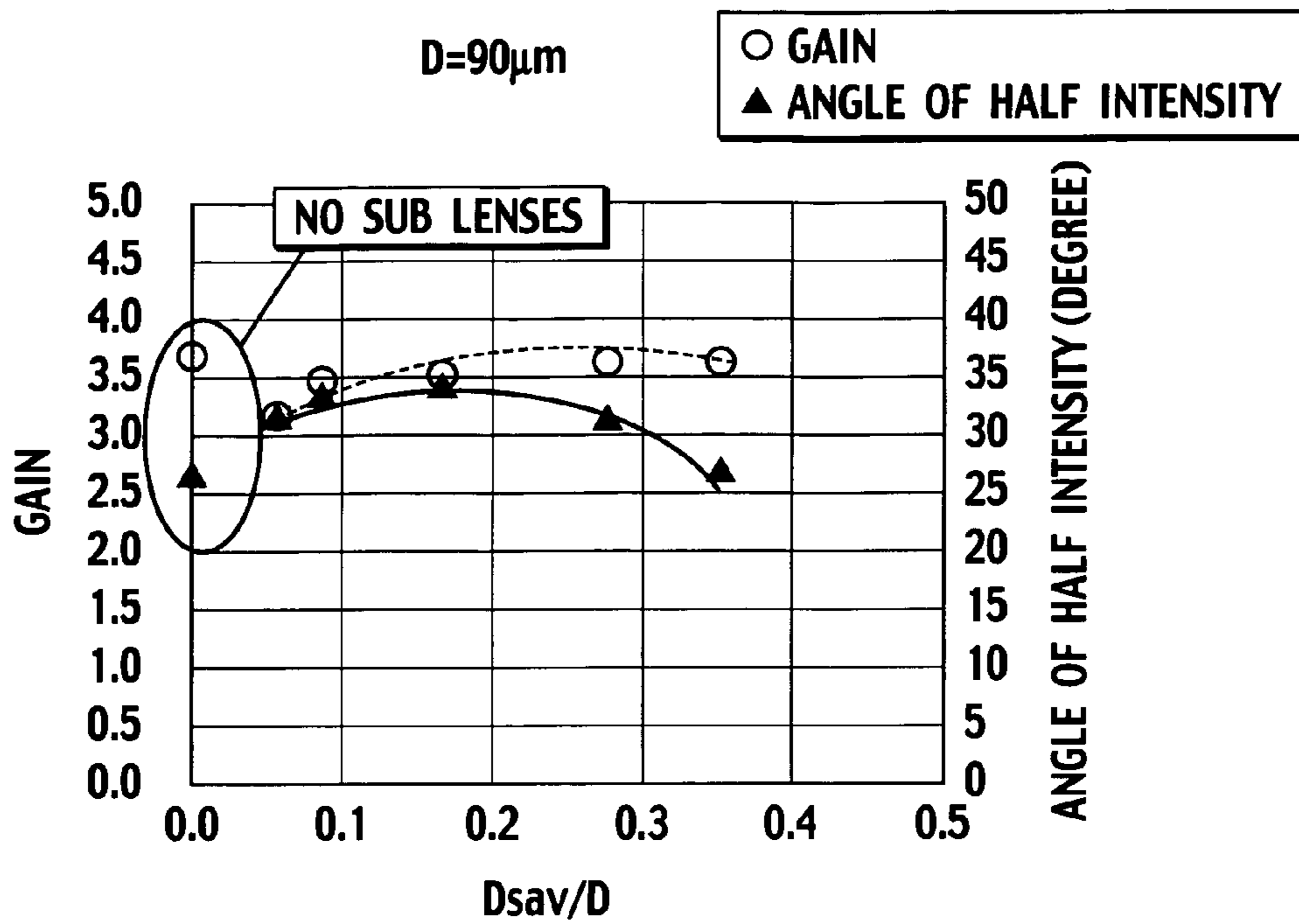


FIG.6B

D=130 μ m

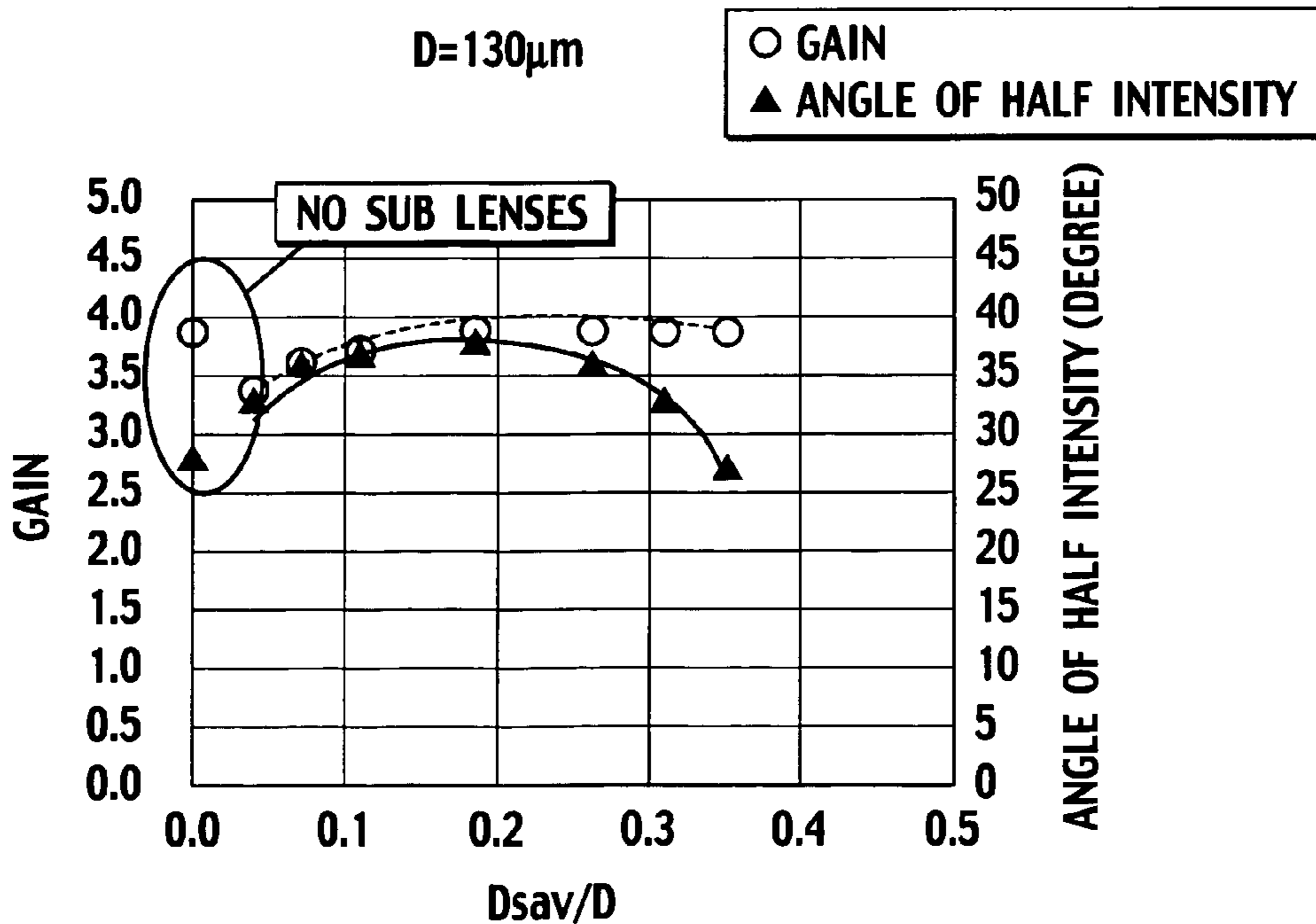


FIG.7A

D=90 μ m

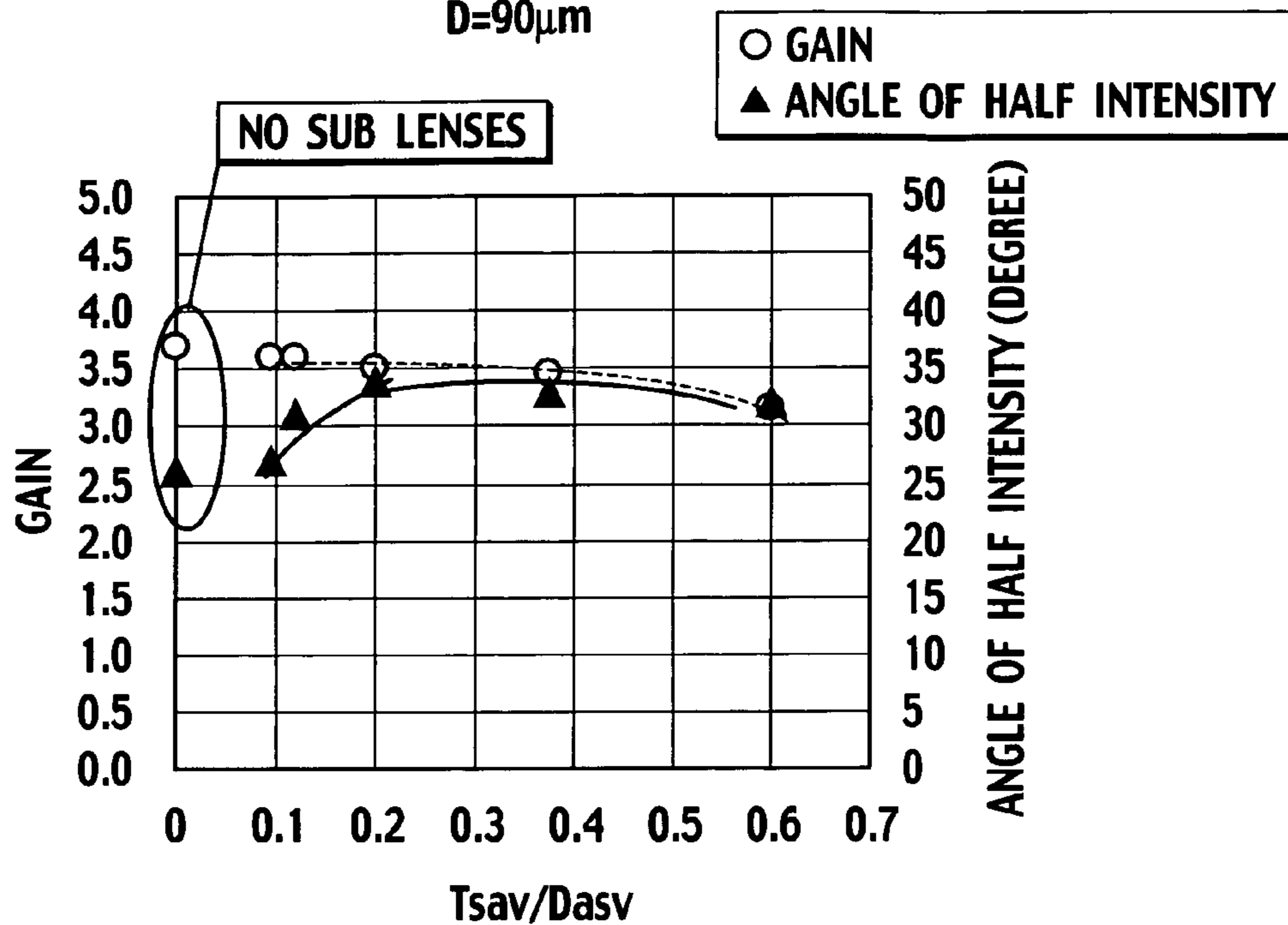
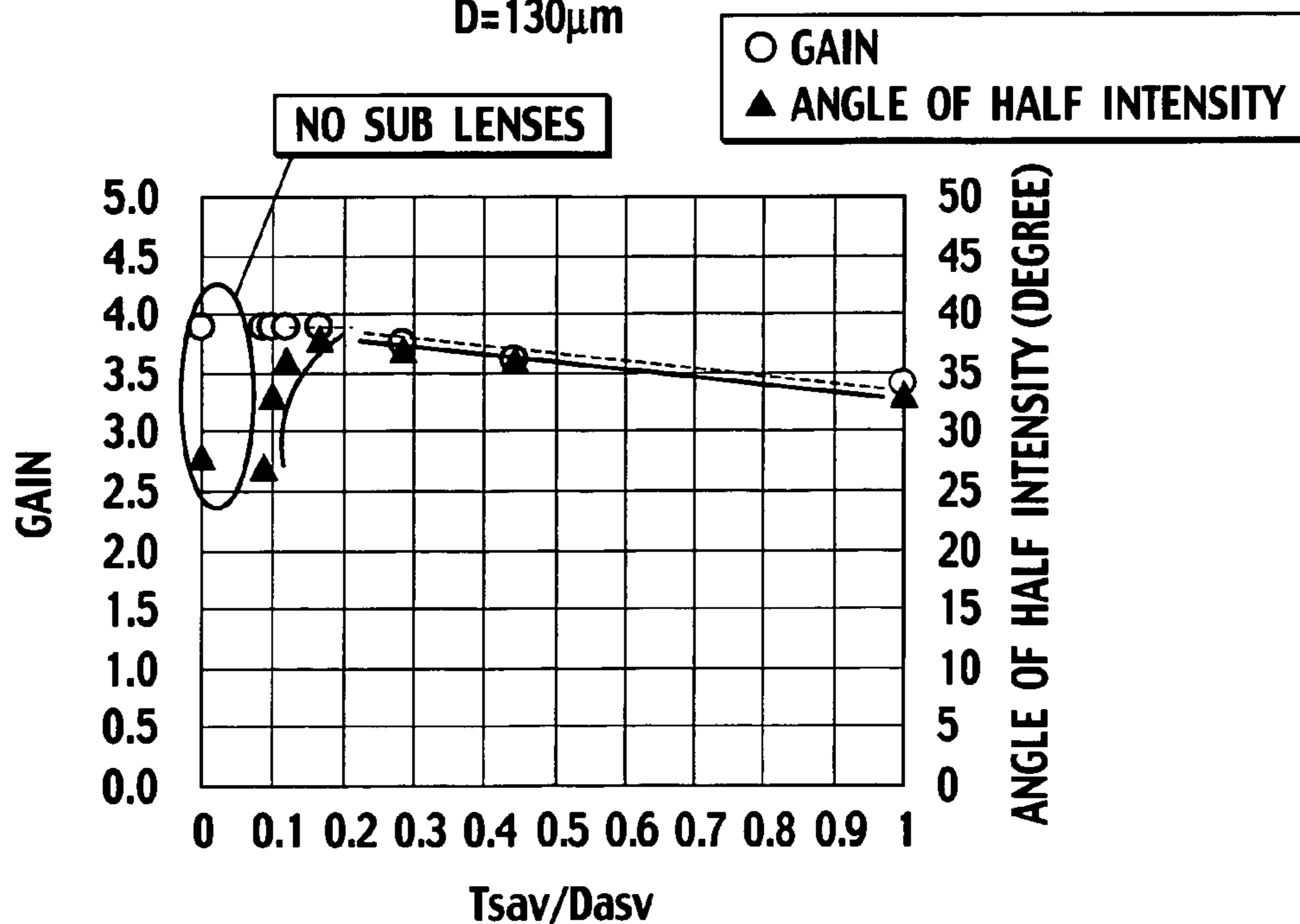
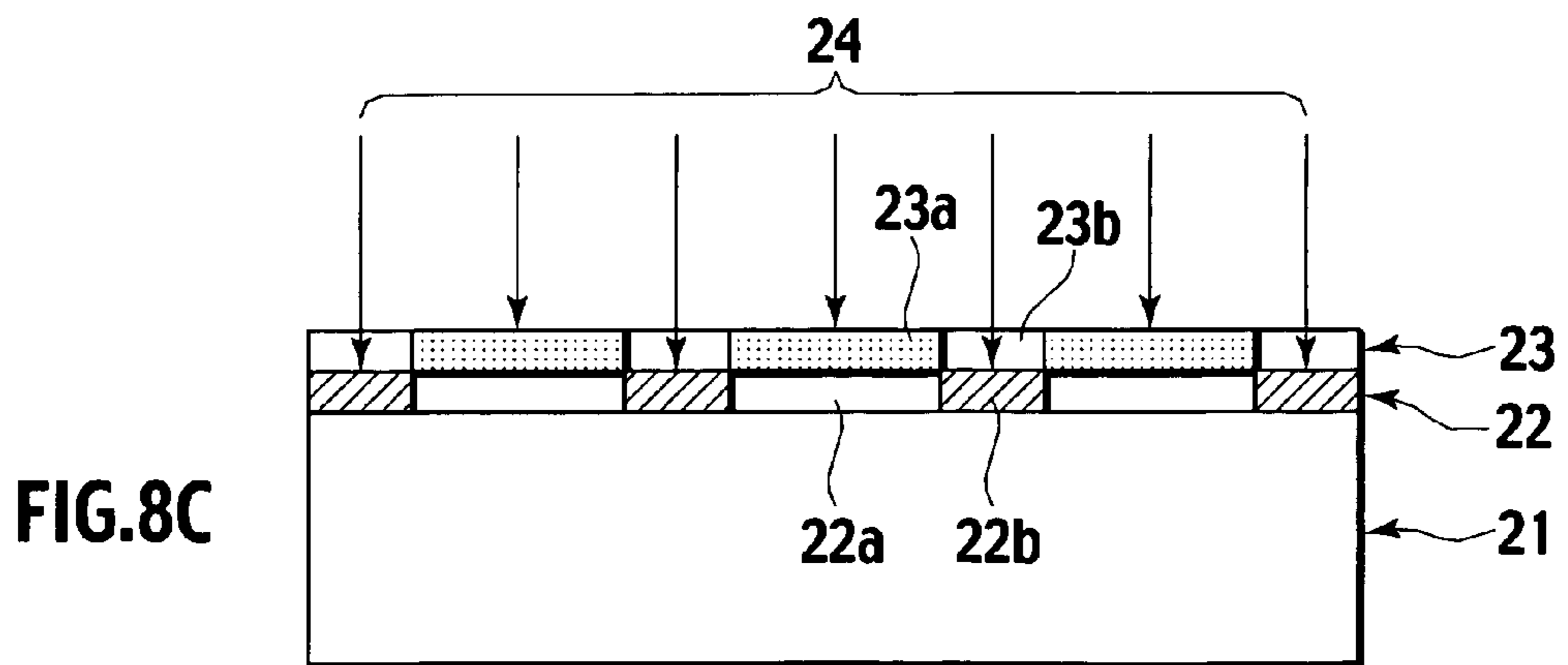
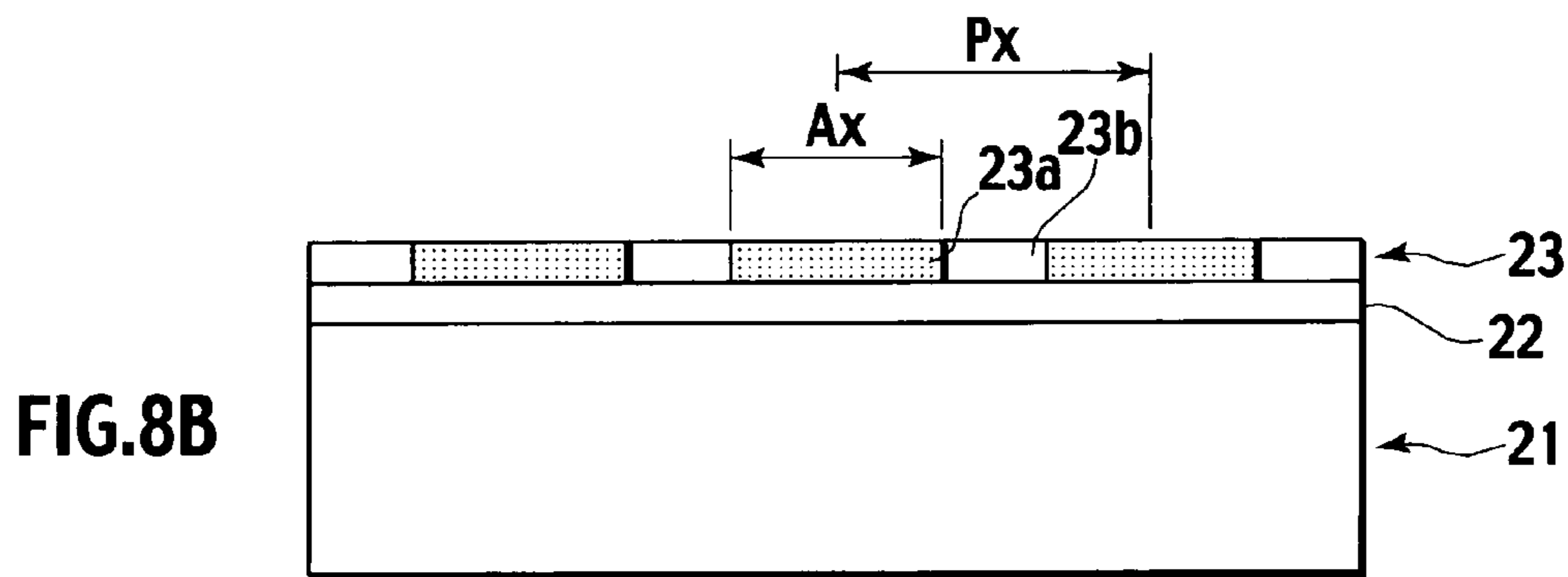
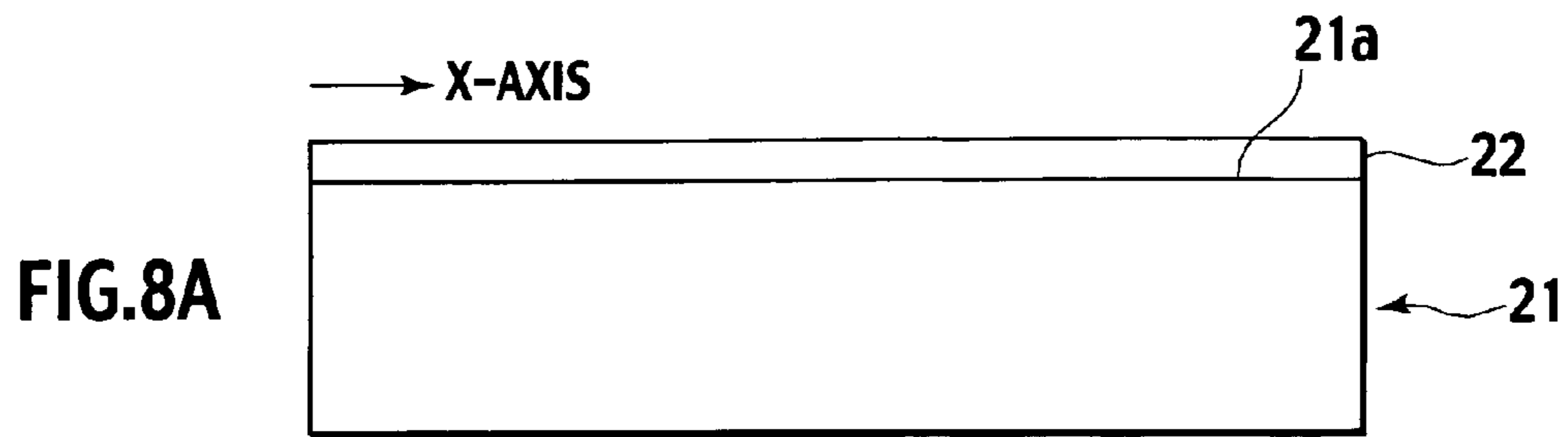
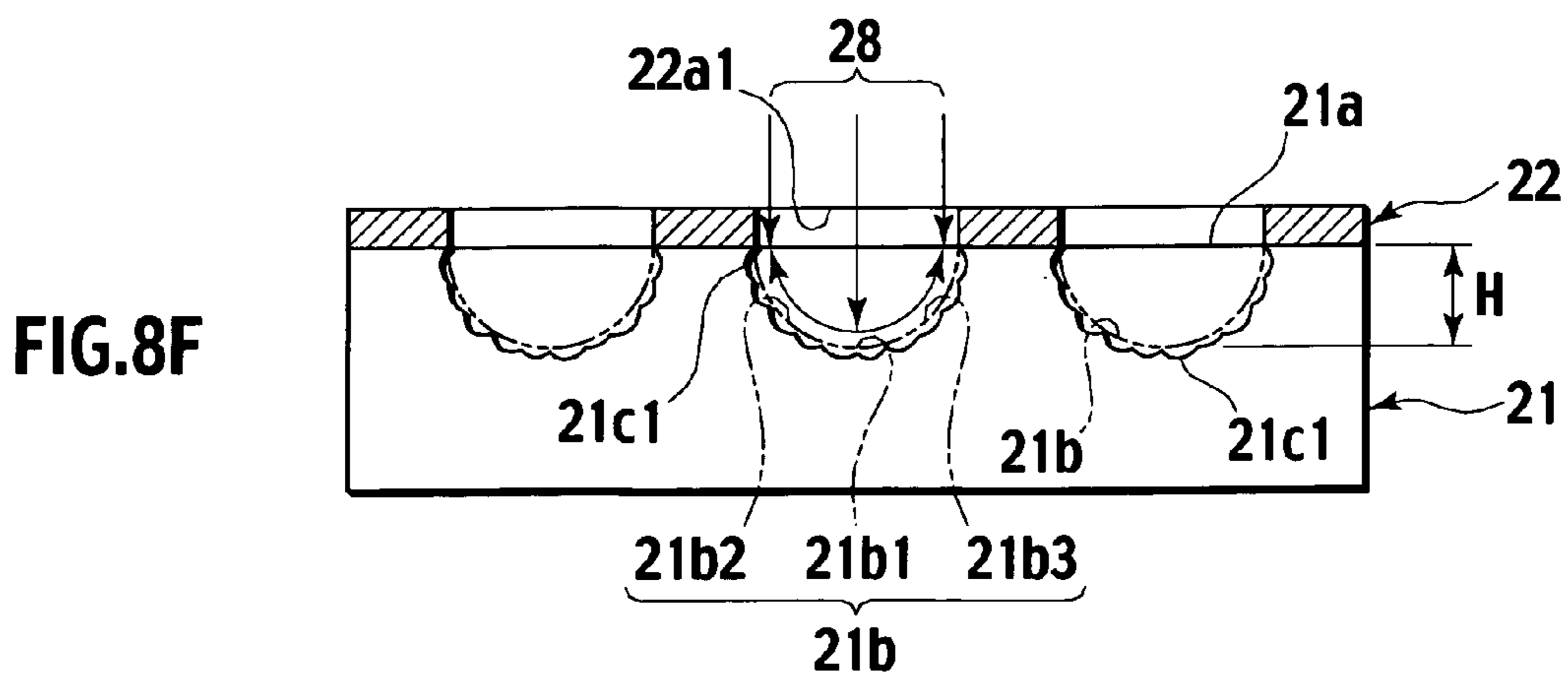
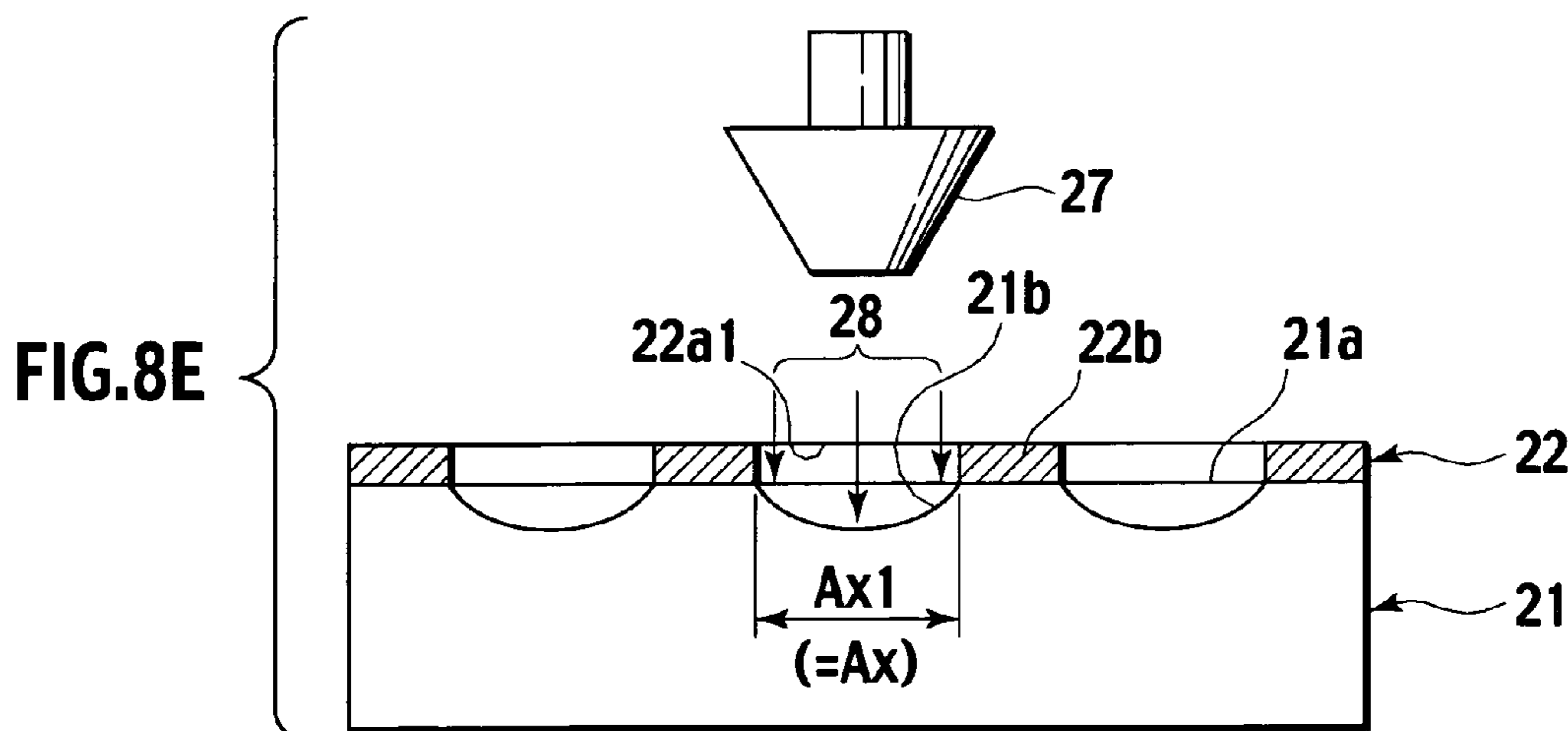
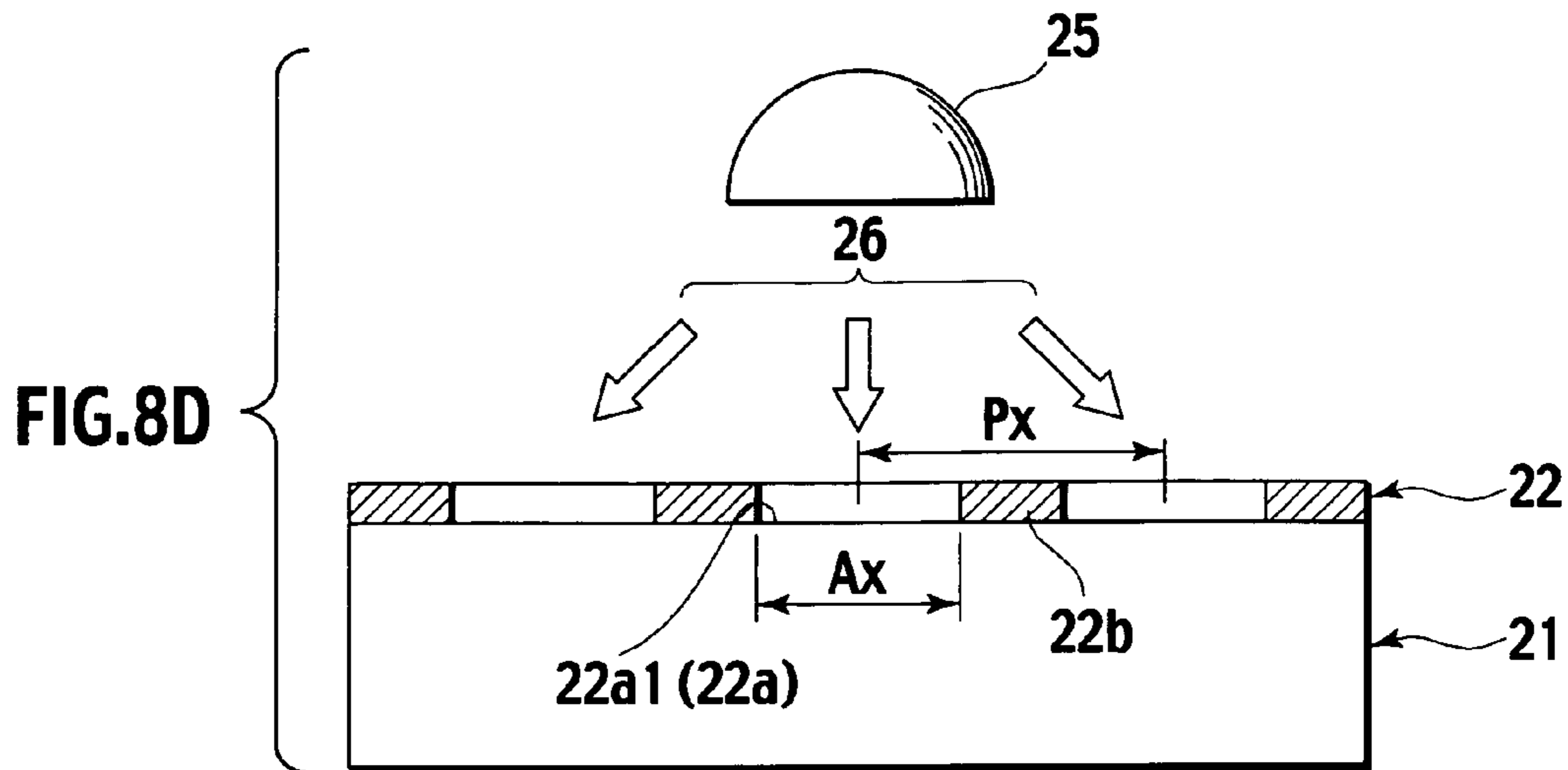


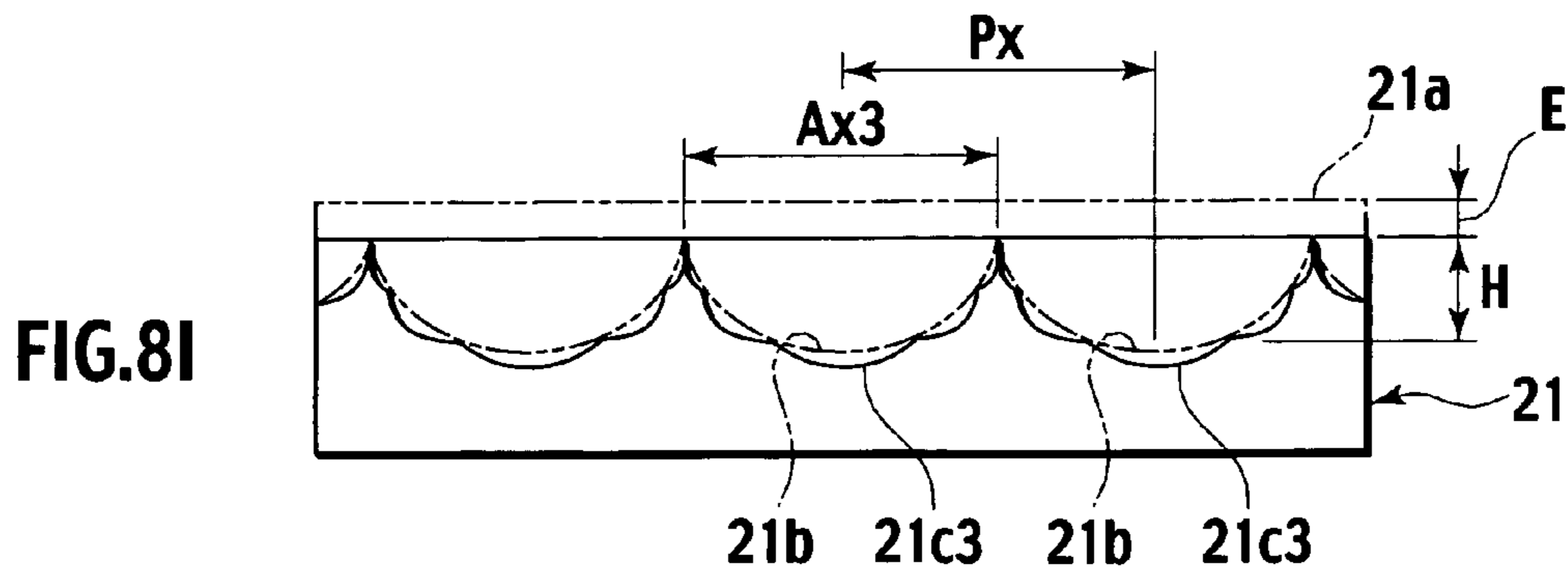
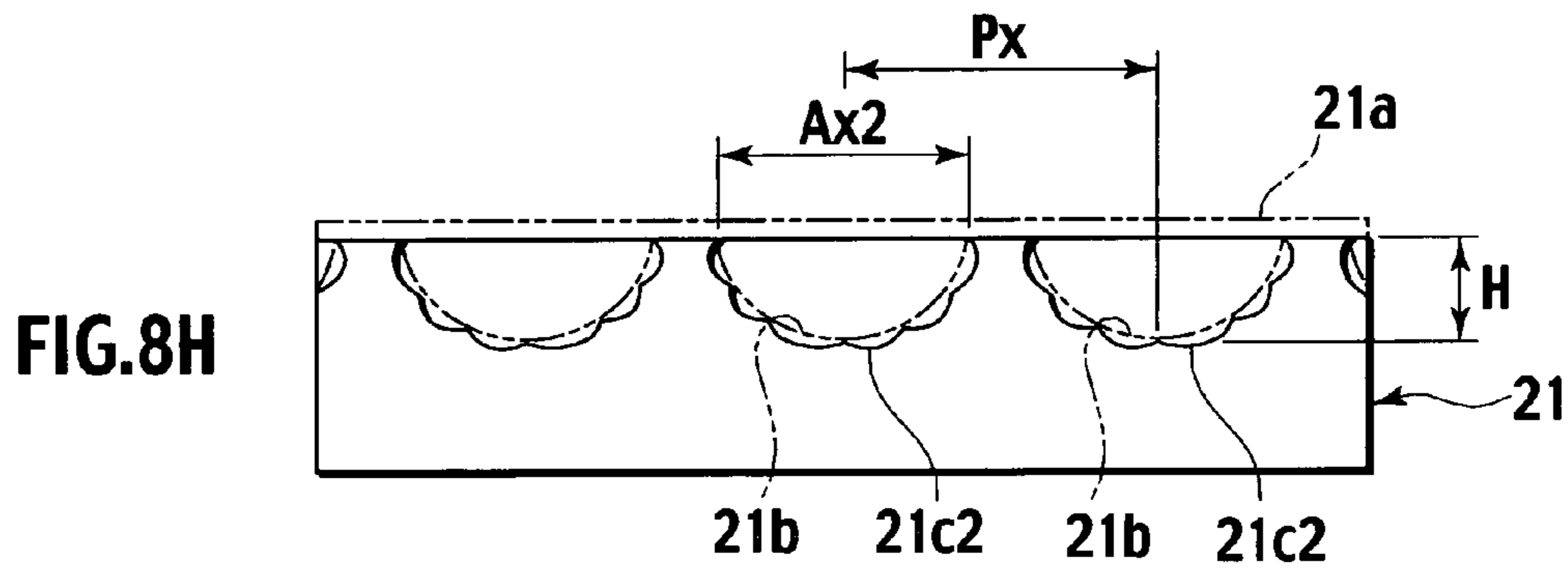
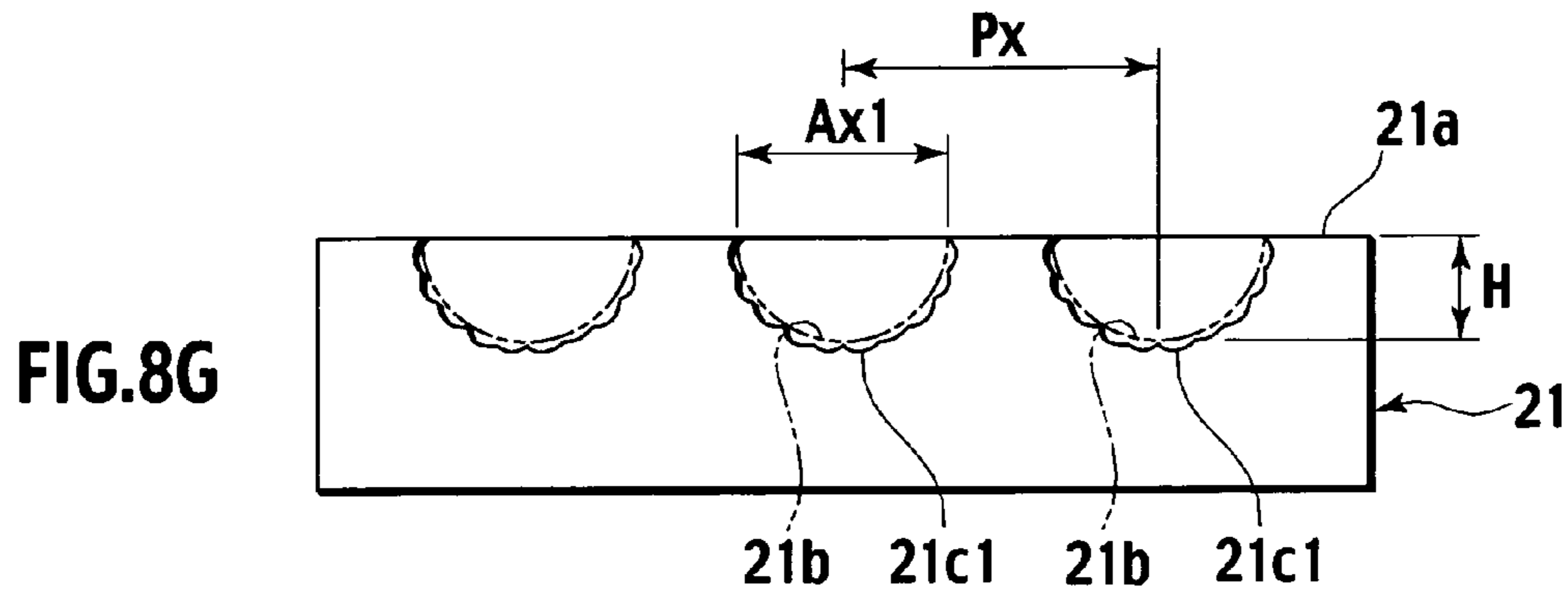
FIG.7B

D=130 μ m









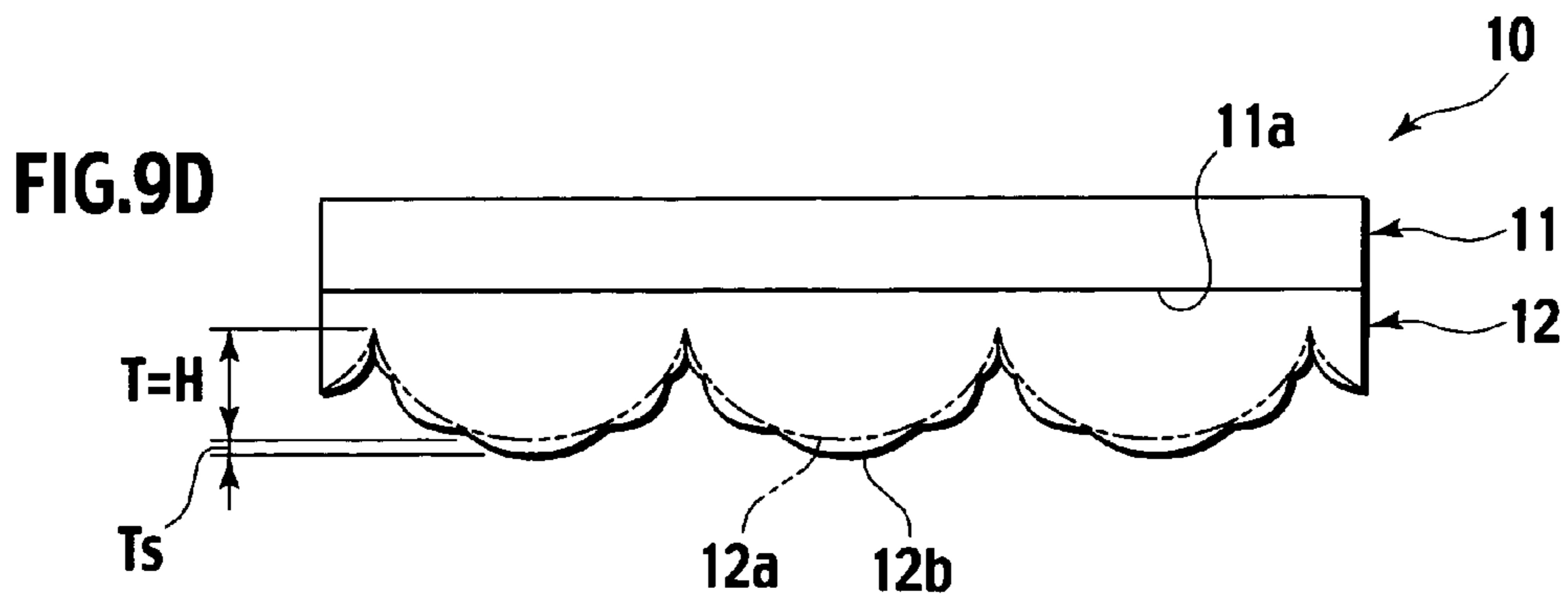
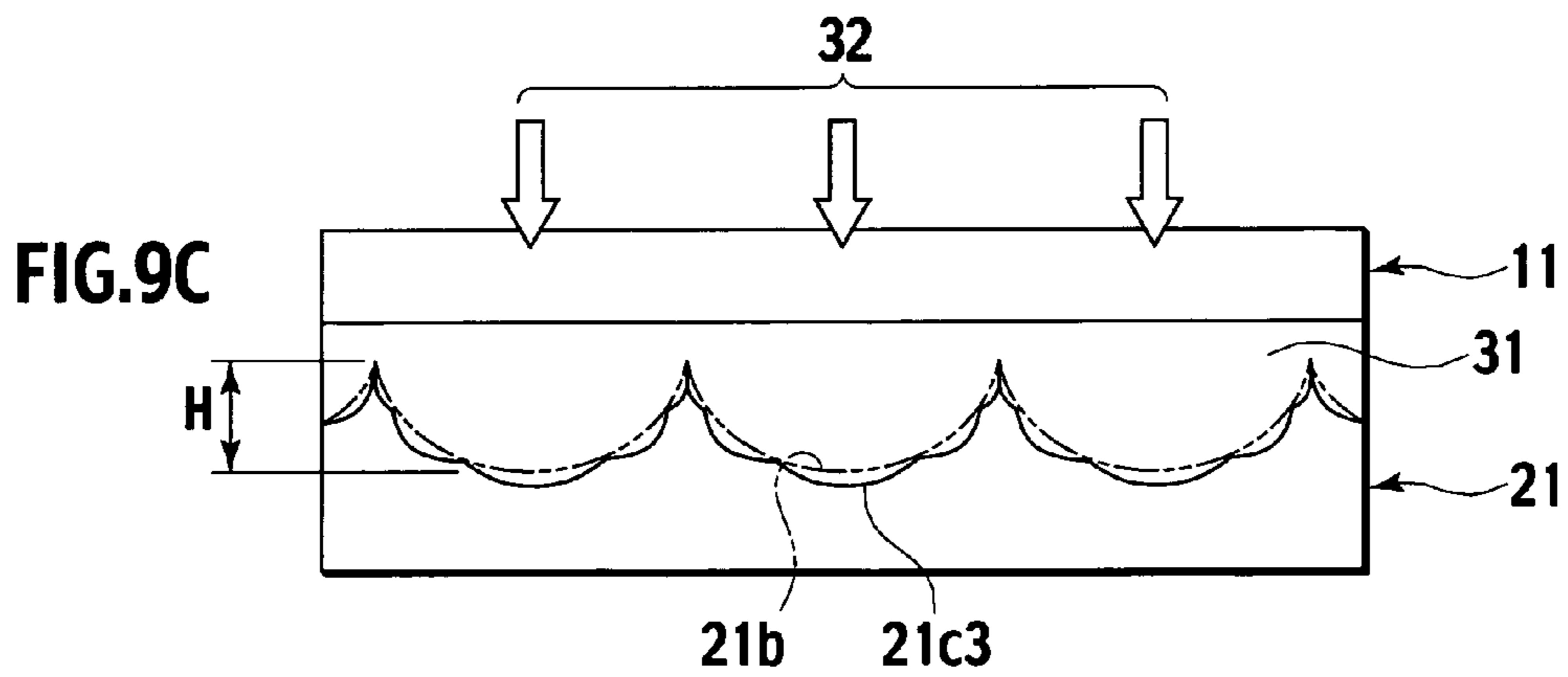
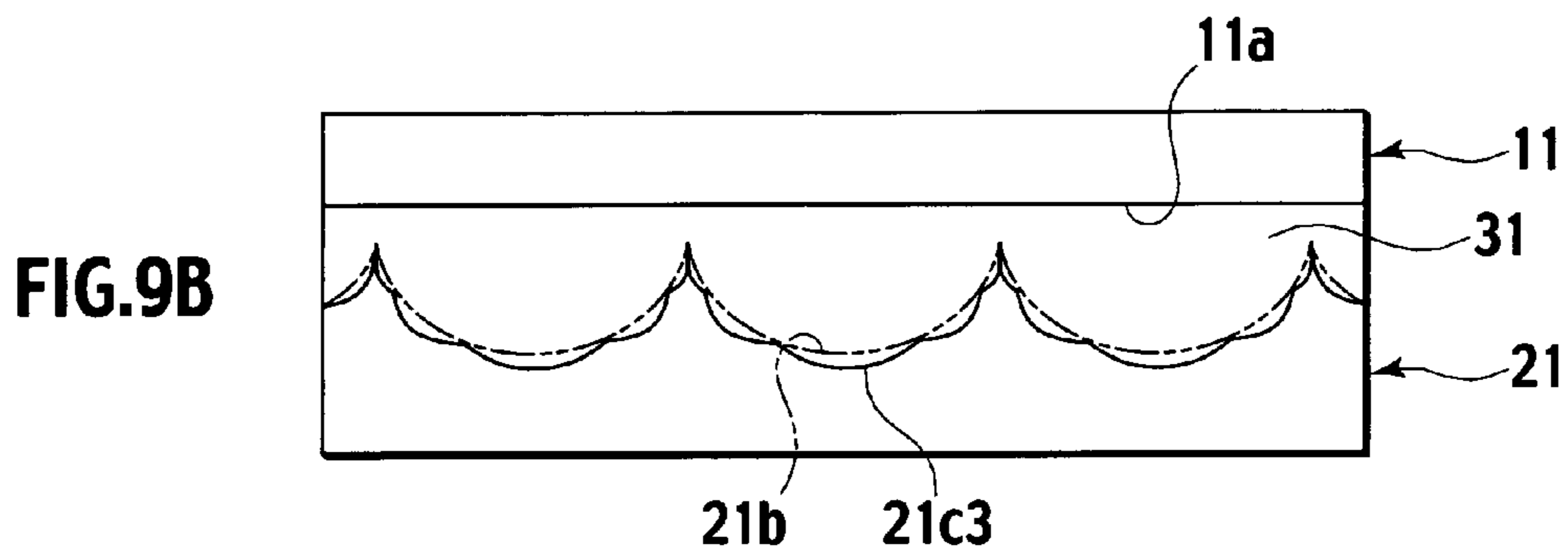
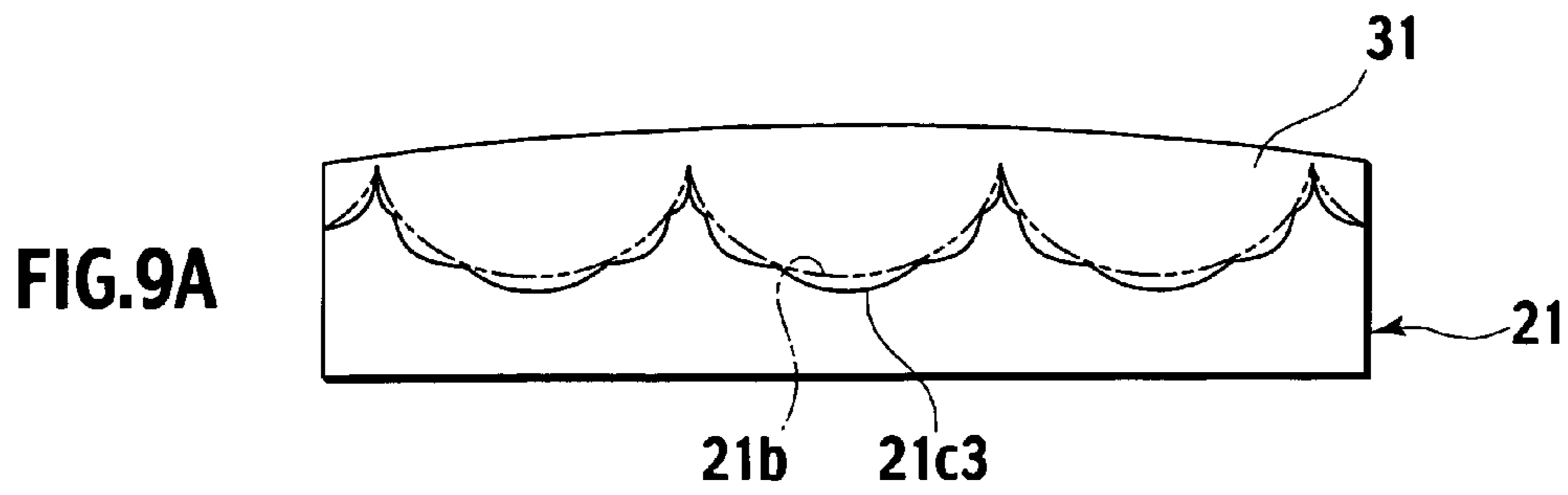


FIG.10A

DRY FILM		ETCHING AMOUNT $E=(Px-Ax)/2$	MICRO LENS SIZE D	SUB-LENS SIZE D_{SAV}
OPENING PITCH Px	OPENING WIDTH Ax			
90	40	25	90	32
90	60	15	90	25
90	70	10	90	15
90	75	7.5	90	8
90	80	5	90	5

(UNIT : MICROMETER)

FIG.10B

DRY FILM		ETCHING AMOUNT $E=(Px-Ax)/2$	MICRO LENS SIZE D	SUB-LENS SIZE D_{SAV}
OPENING PITCH Px	OPENING WIDTH Ax			
130	40	45	130	45
130	60	35	130	40
130	80	25	130	34
130	100	15	130	24
130	110	10	130	14
130	115	7.5	130	9
130	120	5	130	4

(UNIT : MICROMETER)

FIG.11A

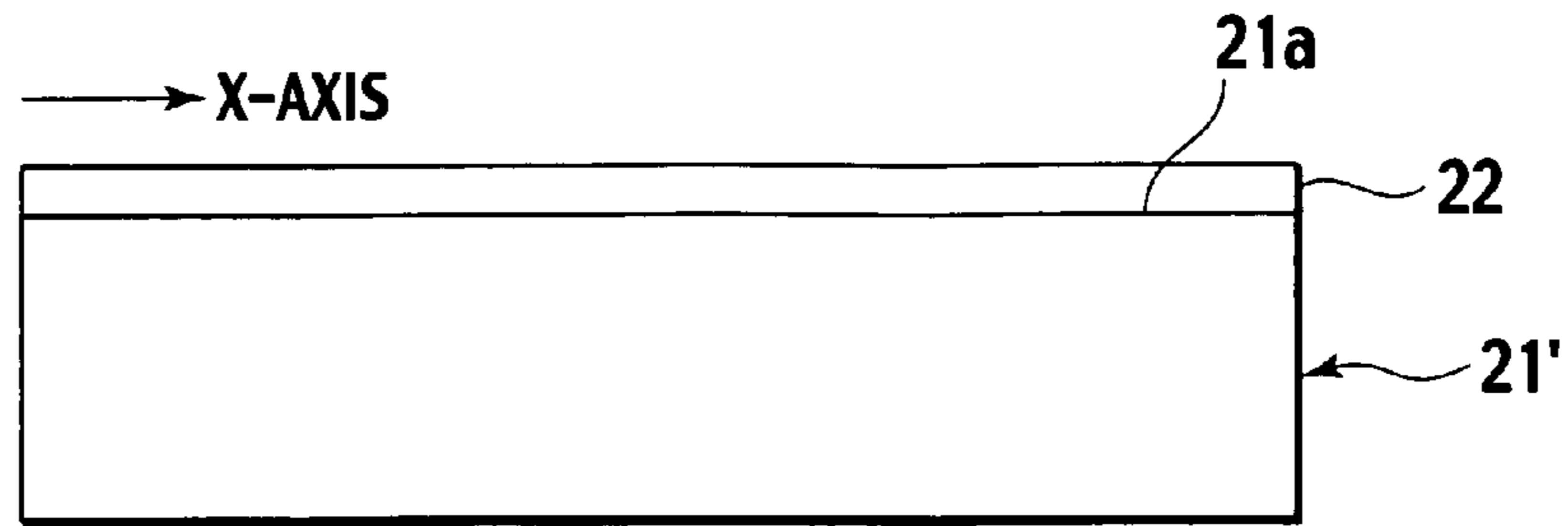


FIG.11B

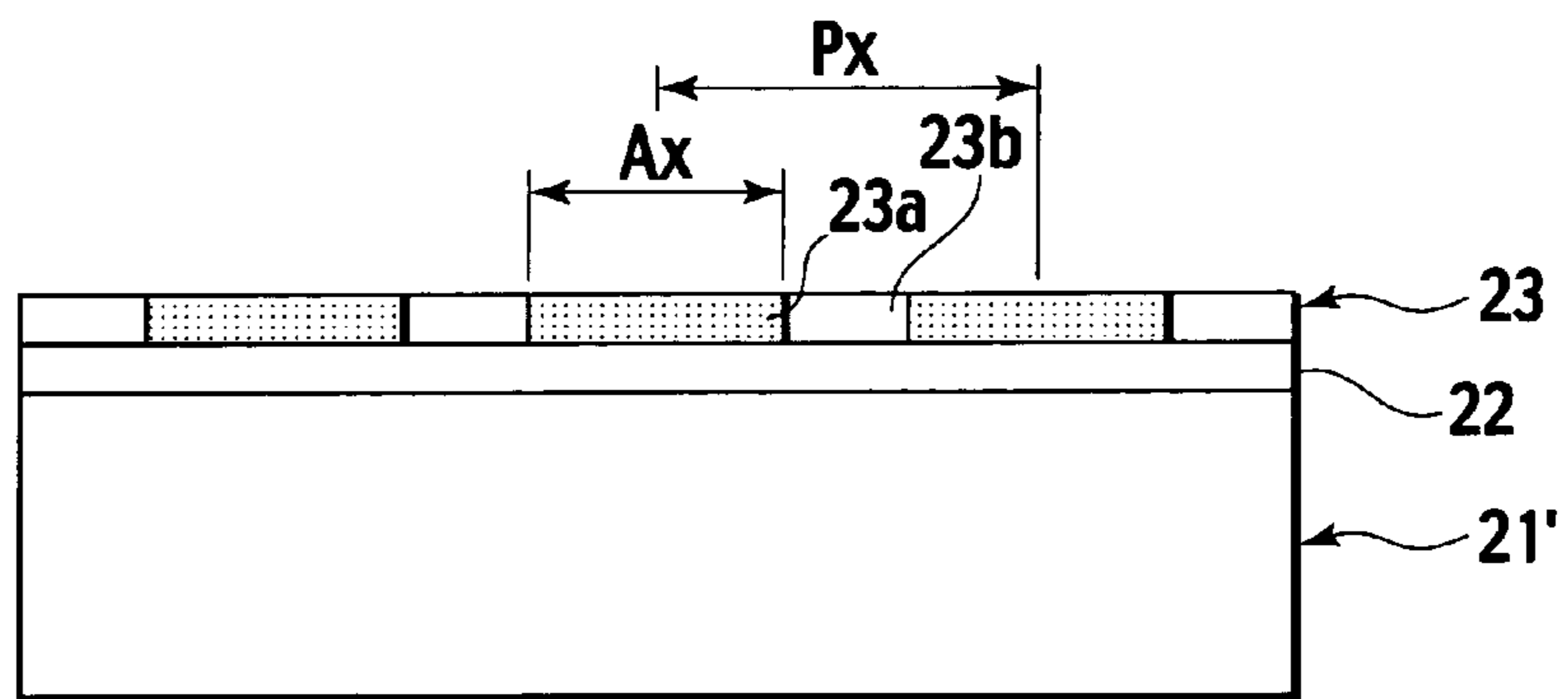
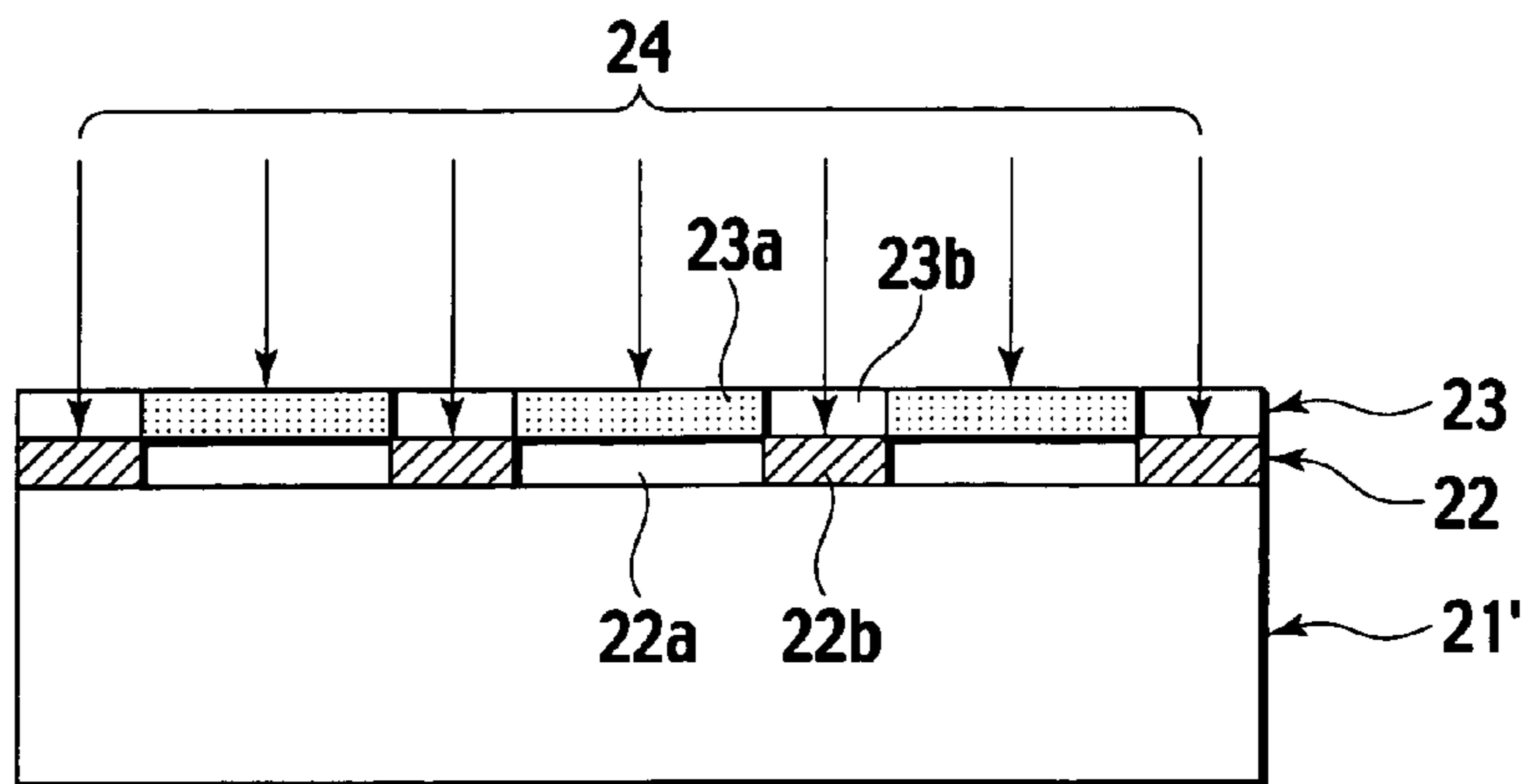
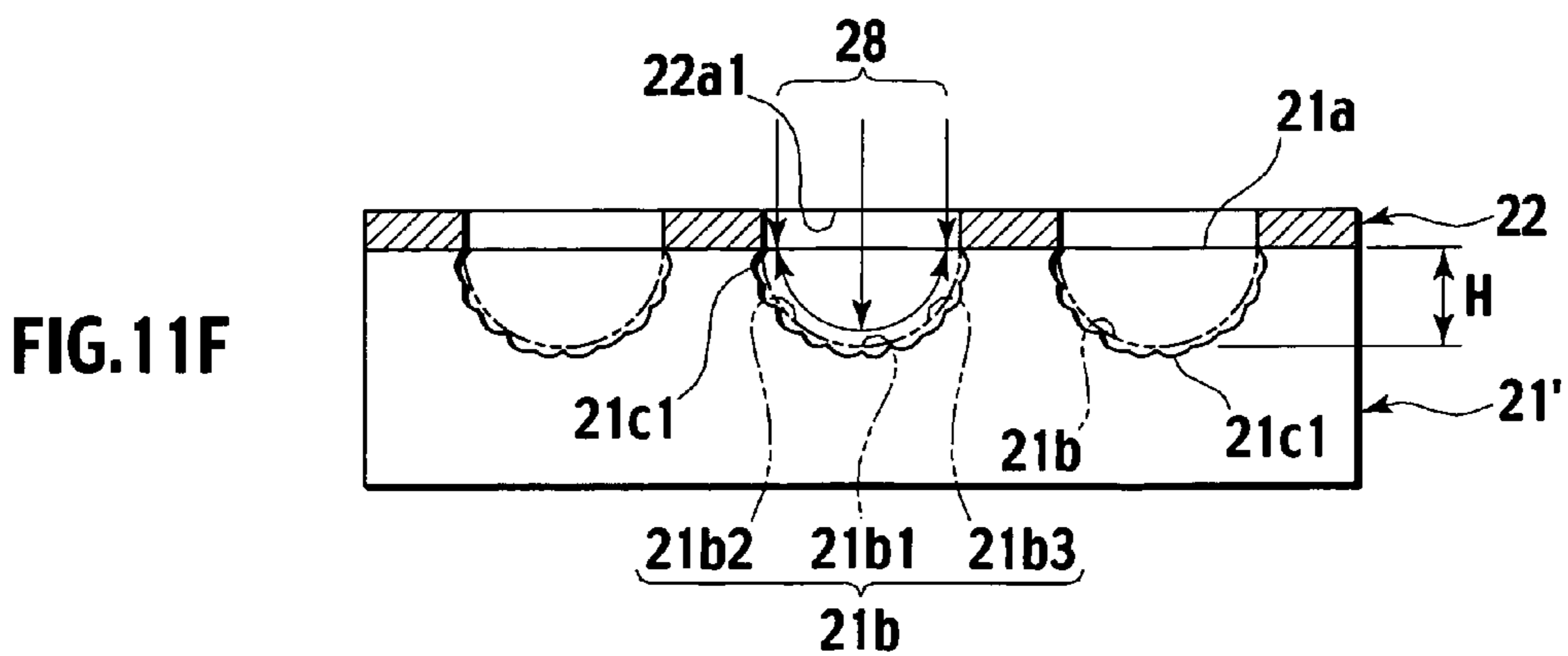
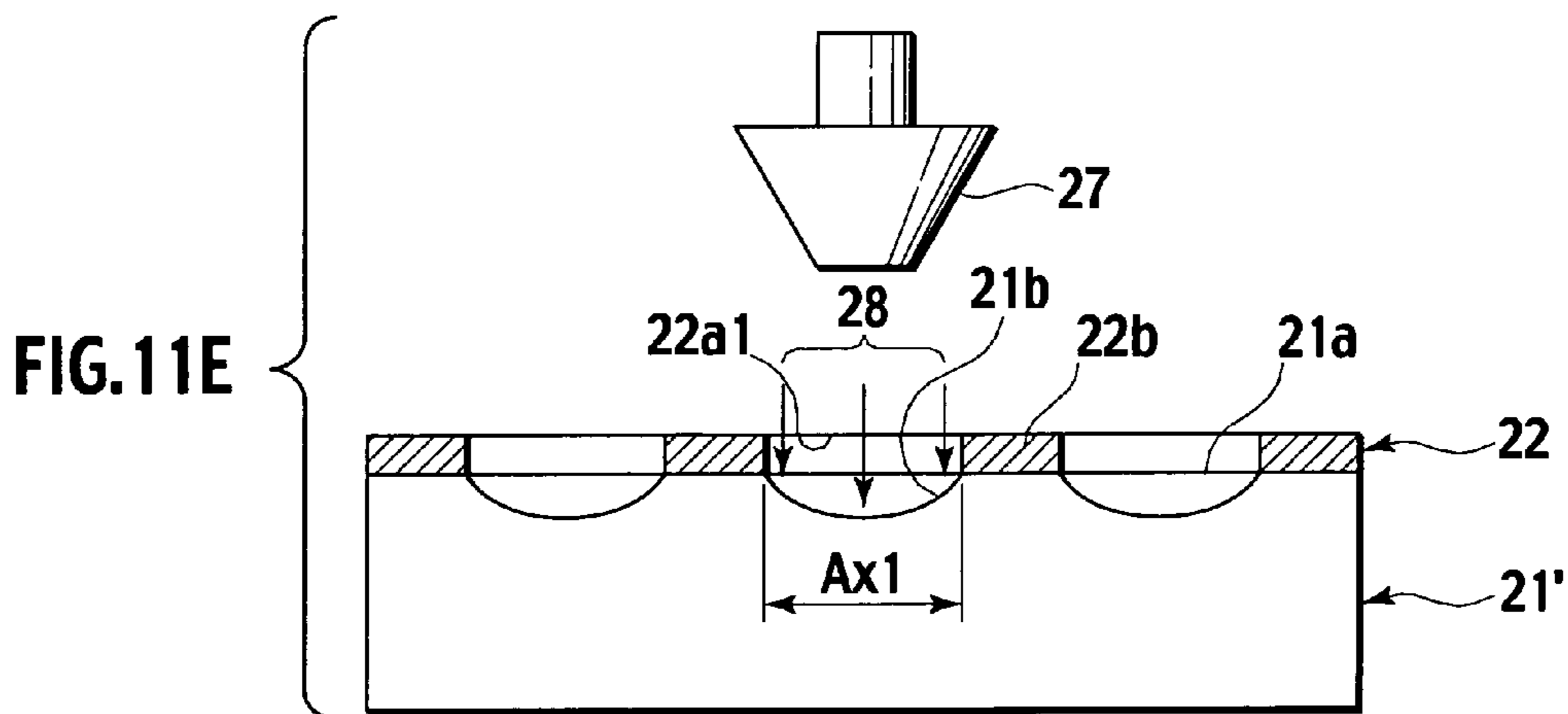
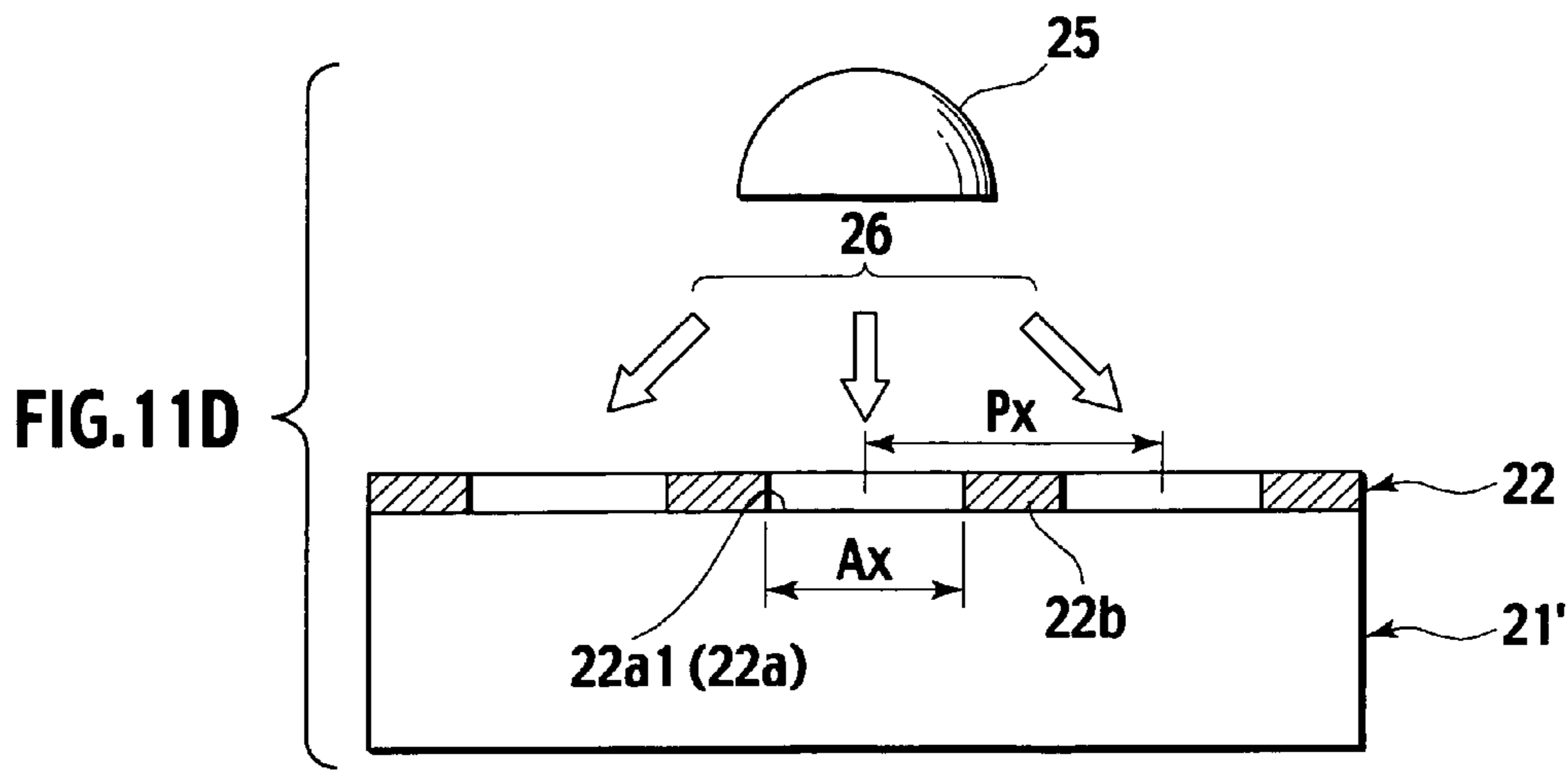


FIG.11C





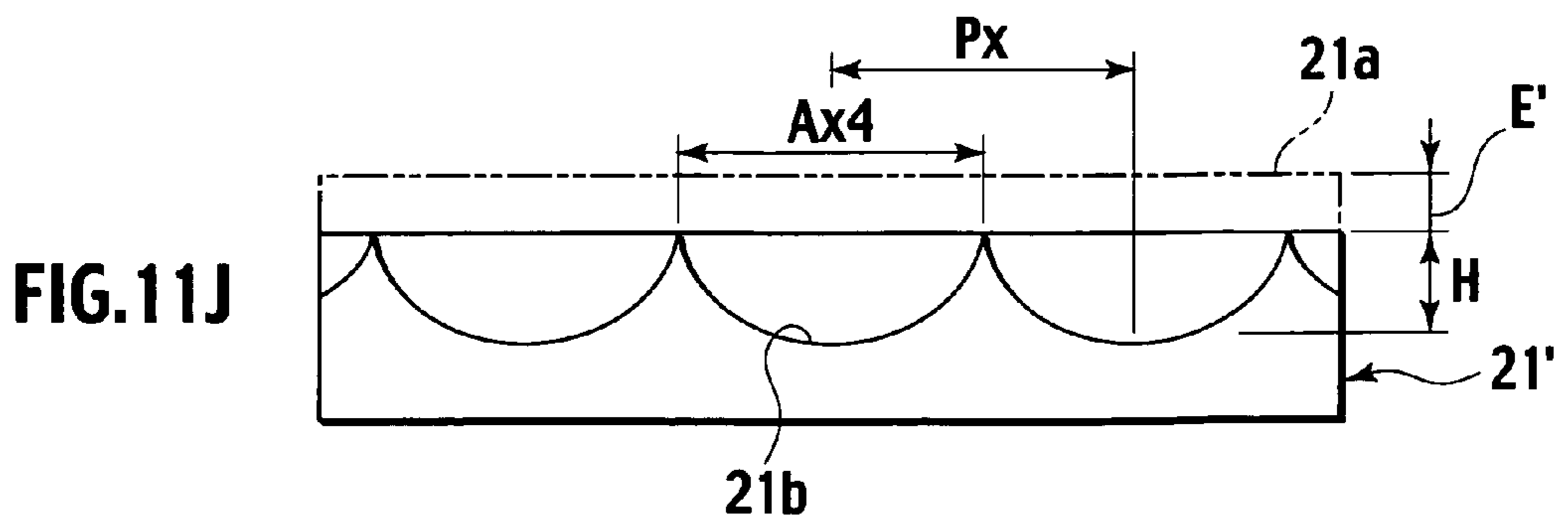
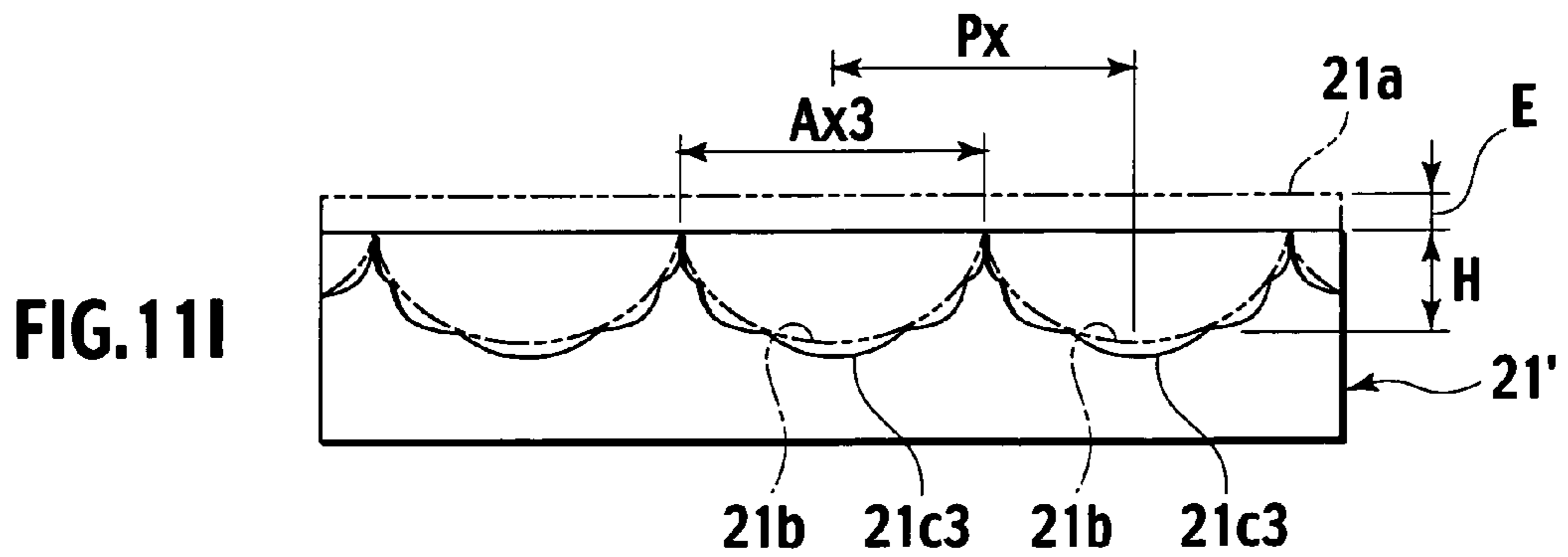
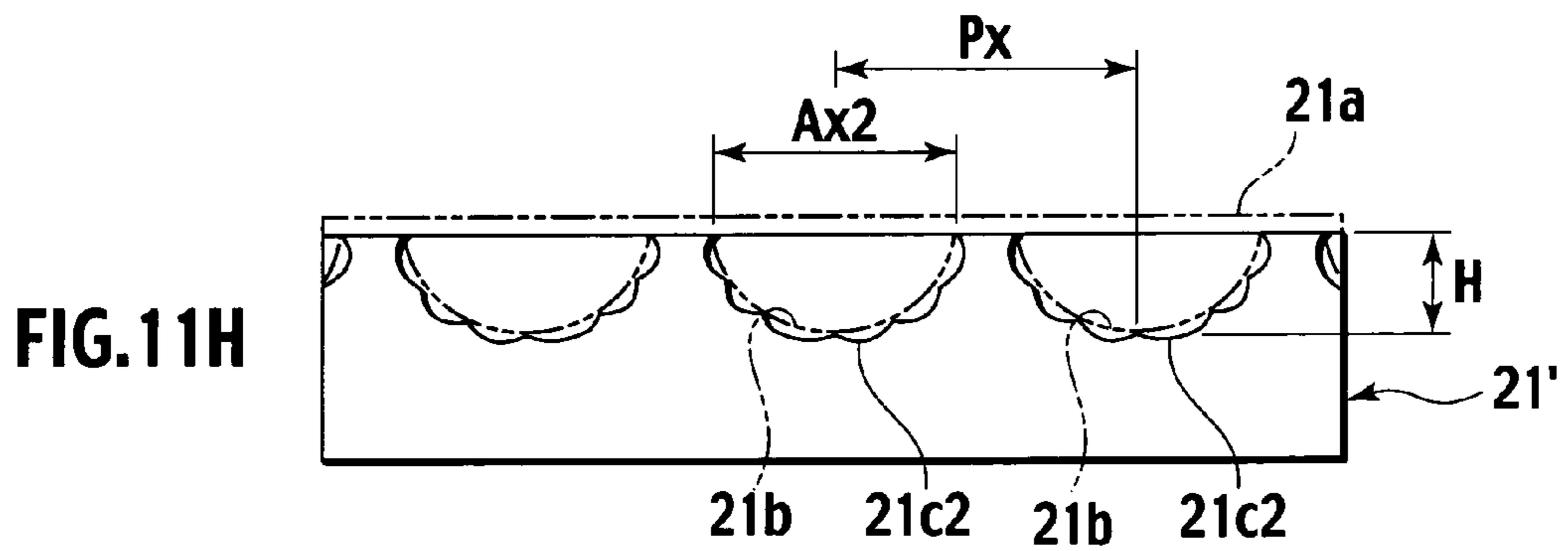
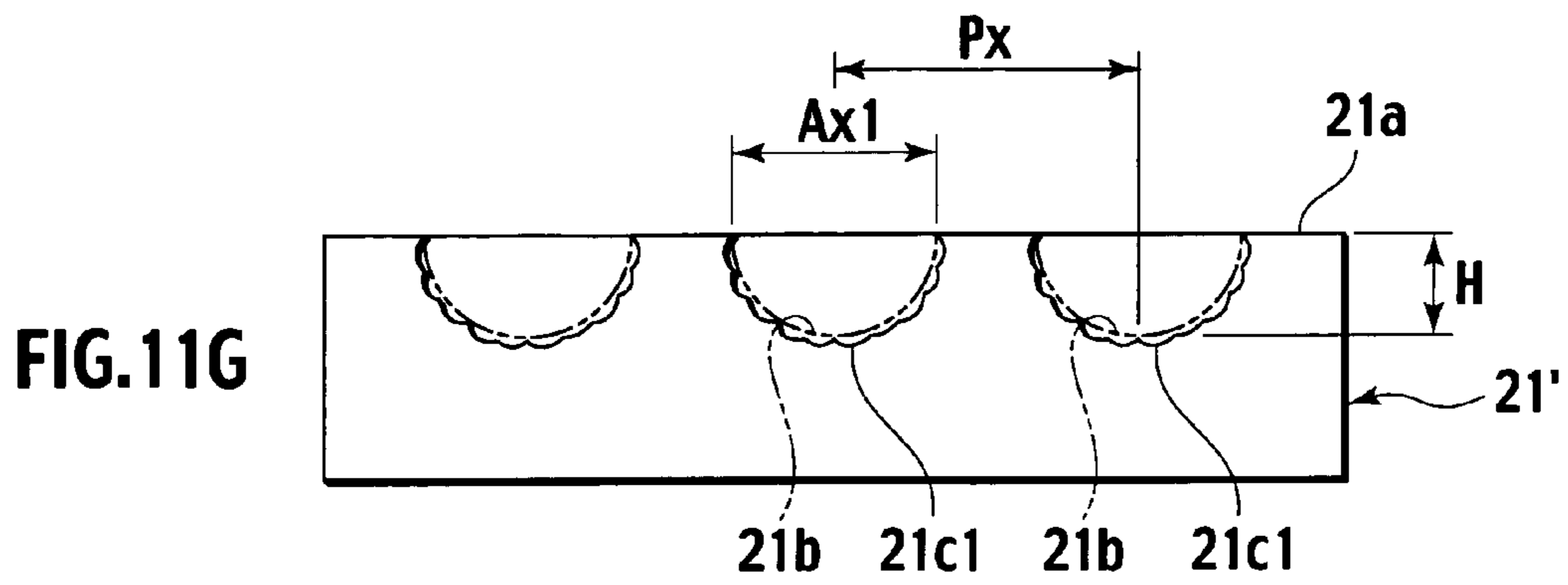


FIG. 12A

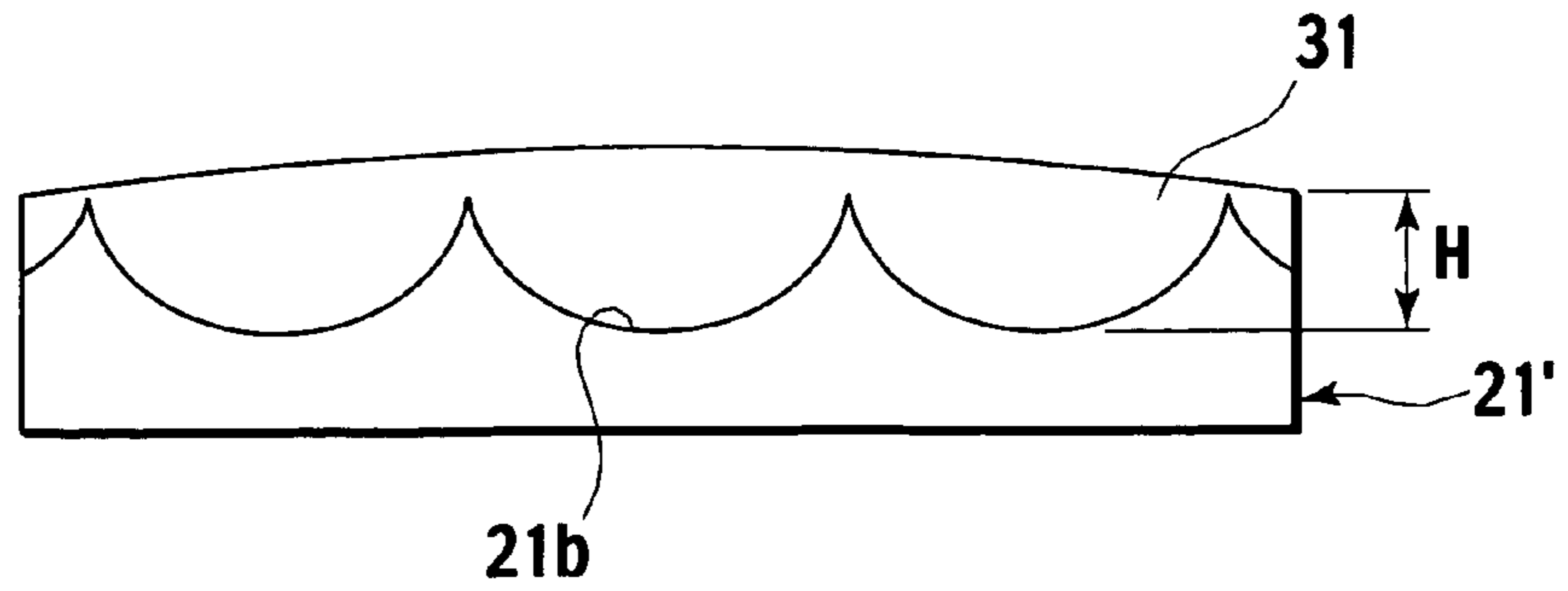


FIG. 12B

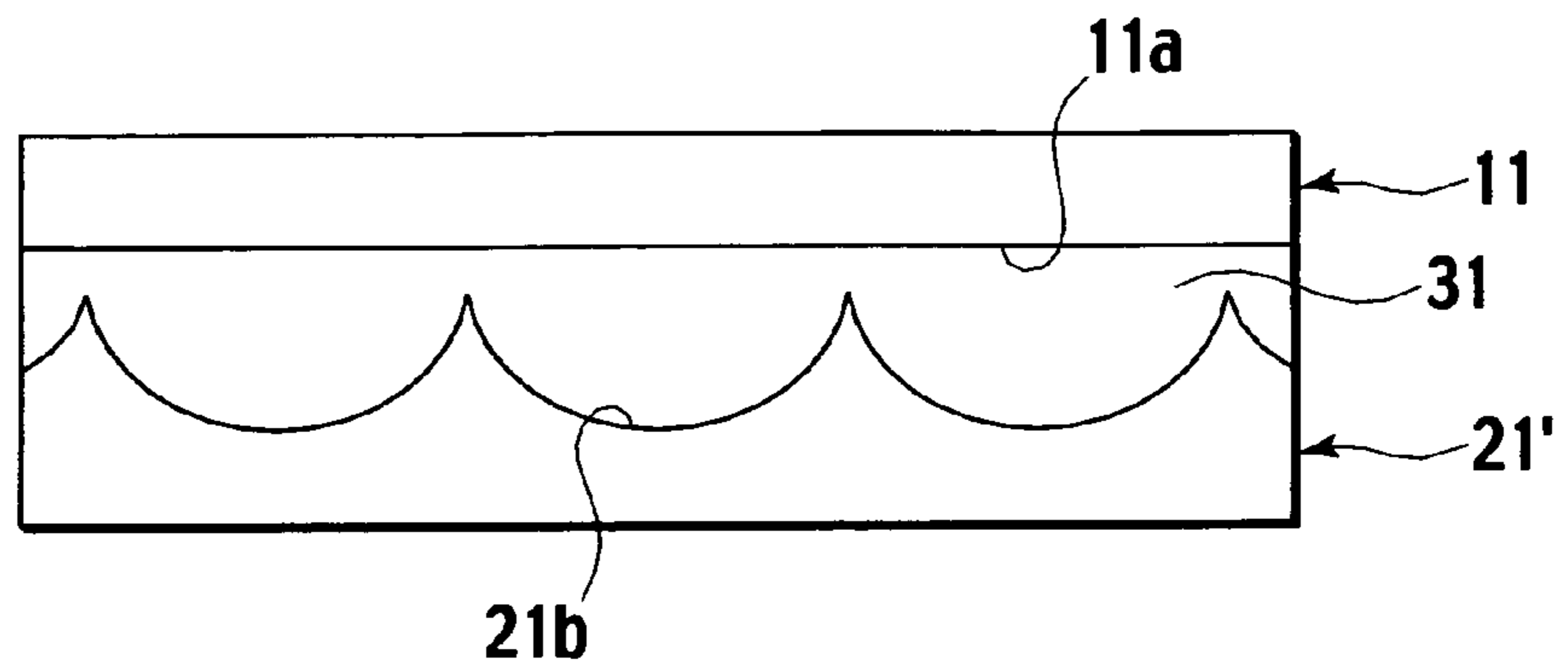


FIG. 12C

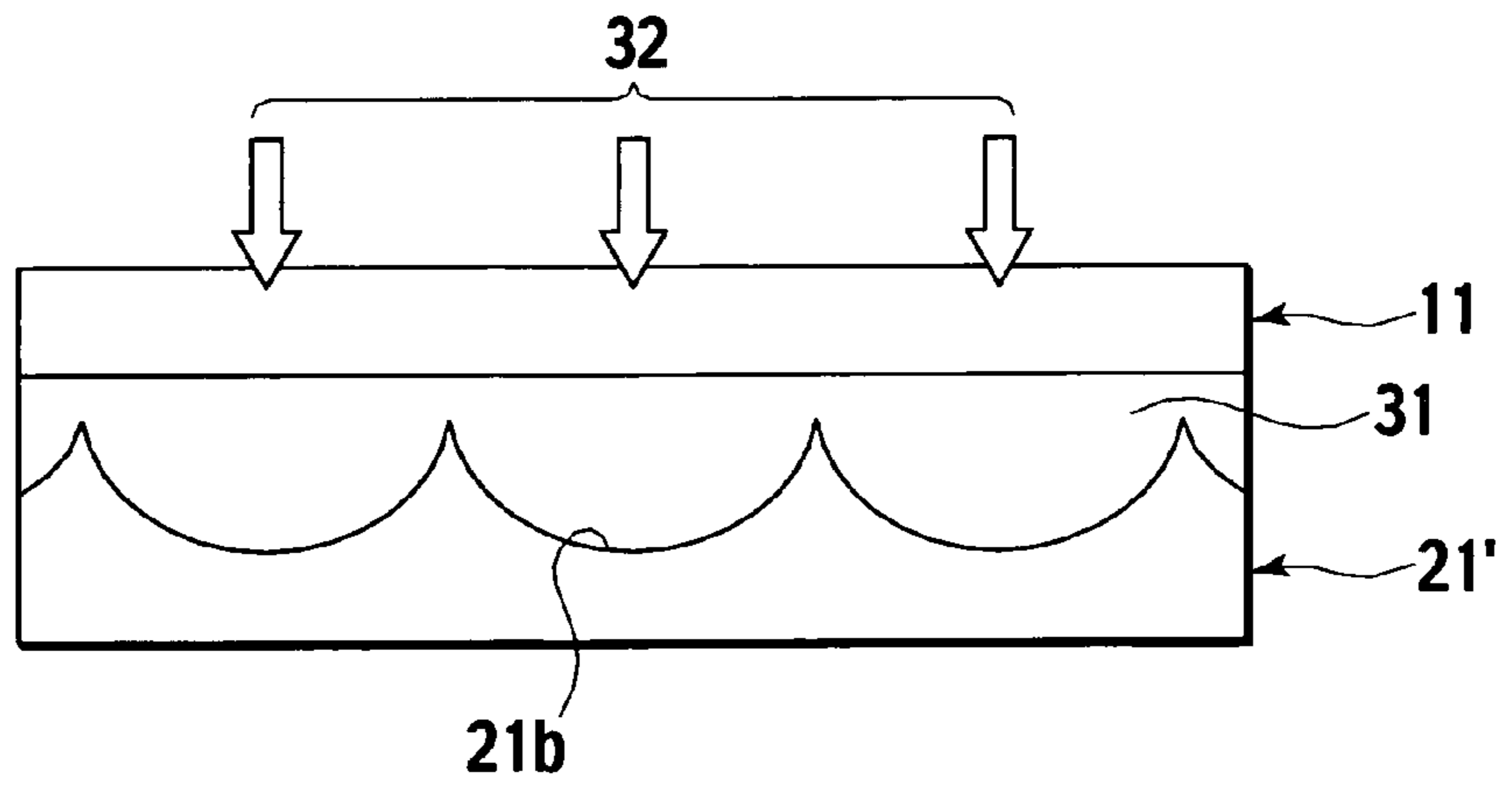
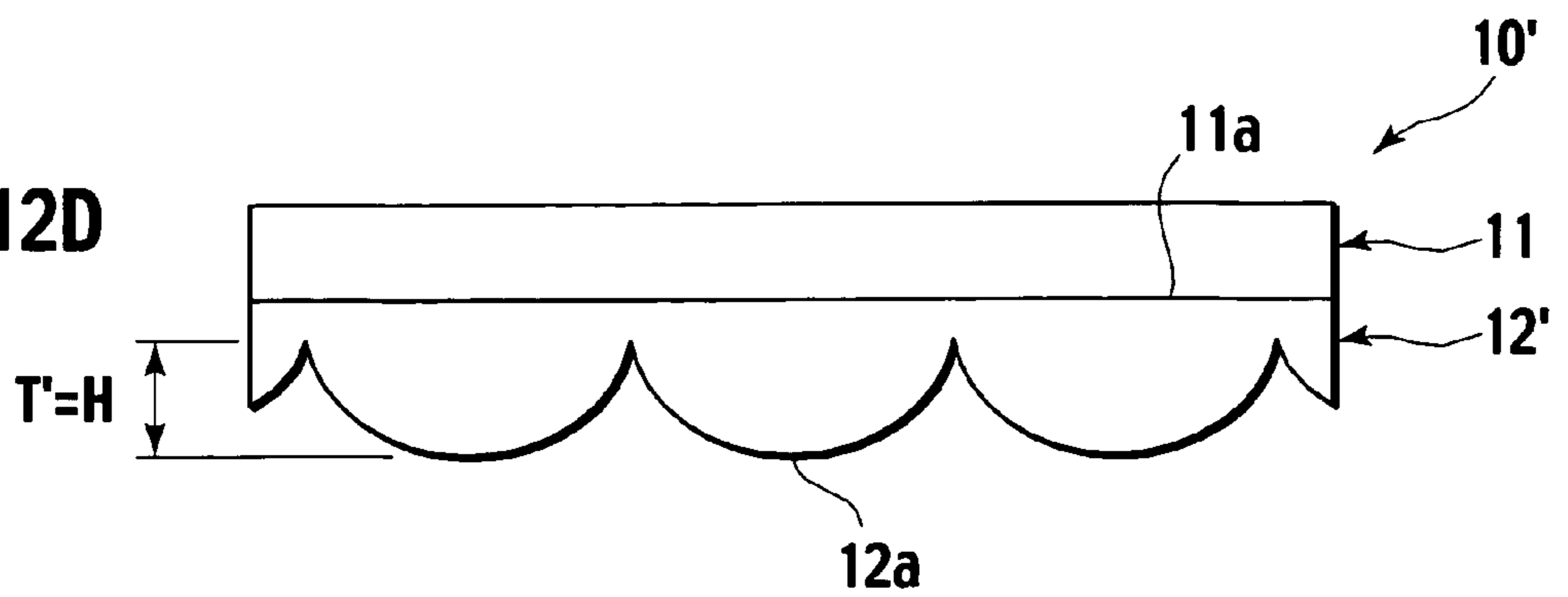


FIG. 12D



MICRO LENS ARRAY AND A METHOD OF MANUFACTURING A REPLICATION MOLD FOR THE SAME

This is a Continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/049,633 filed Feb. 3, 2005, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,110,643 the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a micro lens array in which a plural of a convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of the micro lenses are protrusively formed along the surface of each micro lens.

The present invention also relates to a method of manufacturing a replication mold for the micro lens array.

2. Description of the Related Art

The micro lens array configured by arranging a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses closely in two dimensions is used for a liquid crystal display, an optical coupler element, an image input device, and the like.

Making use of optical anisotropy, orientation, fluidity and the like of a liquid crystal molecule, a liquid crystal display creates images using a liquid crystal cell on which an optical shutter is arranged the shutter being capable of changing an optical transparency or reflectivity thereof on application of voltage to the cell. The liquid crystal display is categorized into two types: a direct-view-type display in which images created by liquid crystal cells are directly observed; and a projection-type display in which images created on a screen by being projected from the front or the back are observed.

The above-mentioned direct-view-type display is somewhat disadvantageous in that image quality changes with observation angles. In other words, while the display has the highest brightness when seen from the normal direction, the brightness becomes lower when the observation angle deviates from the normal direction. At worst, the display is unobservable when seen from a certain view angle or above. That is, this type of display has a disadvantage in that an appropriate angle of view is narrow.

In order to eliminate this disadvantage, there has been proposed a method of increasing an angle of view by combining a liquid crystal display and a micro lens array, in other words, a method of disposing in front of a liquid crystal cell a micro lens array configured by arranging a plural of micro lenses closely in two dimensions.

Also, there has been proposed a use of the micro lens array for a screen so as to expand the angle of view in the projection-type display in which images are created on a screen by being projected from the back.

An example of this type of micro lens array is a micro lens array configured by disposing a plural of micro lenses having a convex shape in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement as disclosed in Japanese Patent Application Publication No. 2001-305315 (for example on page 7, FIG. 7).

In addition, as a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array configured by arranging a plural of micro lenses in two dimensions, the method utilizing an etching or sandblasting technique, has been known, as disclosed in Japanese Patent Application Publication No. H10-62604 (pages 3-6, FIG. 1).

Furthermore, there have been disclosed a lenticular lens sheet having fine asperity on the surface of a lenticular lens device (see for example, Japanese Patent Publication No. 3,212,359 (pages 3-4, FIG. 1), a micro lens array having a compound spherical surface on which two or more types of fine convex-concave shapes are formed, and a method of manufacturing the same (see for example Japanese Patent Application Publication No. H07-63,904 (pages 3-4, FIG. 1)).

FIGS. 1A, 1B and 1C are a front view, a perspective view, and a bottom view of a related-art micro lens array element, respectively. FIGS. 2A to 2C are a process chart showing a related-art method of manufacturing an optical substrate (a replication mold for a micro lens array).

The related-art micro lens array element **100** shown in FIGS. 1A to 1C is disclosed by the above-mentioned Japanese Patent Application Publication No. 2001-305315. The micro lens array element **100** is explained briefly, referring to FIGS. 1A to 1C.

The related-art transparent micro lens array element **100** includes a lens substrate **101** manufactured using a transparent substrate such as a transparent resin substrate, a resin sheet, or the like, and a plural of micro lenses **102a** projected in a shape of a near hemisphere, the micro lenses **102a** being integrally arranged in two dimensions on an upper surface **101a** of the lens substrate **101** as shown in FIGS. 1A to 1C.

When the plural of micro lens **102a** constituting the micro lens array **102** are seen from a bottom face **101b** of the lens substrate **101**, they are arranged in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement and thereby placed at the highest density.

On the bottom face **101b** of the lens substrate **101**, the micro lens array **102** has a light incidence portion (or light exiting portion) **103** in a position which is in agreement with an optical axis K of each micro lens **102a** and a light shielding portion **104** which prevents light from passing therethrough in a position other than each light incidence portion (or light exiting portion) **103**. Each light shielding portion **104** has a diffusion reflection film (or an anti-reflection film) **105** thereon. Japanese Patent Application Publication No. 2001-305315 states that images of high luminosity and high contrast in a large angle of view can be realized with this construction when the micro lens array element **100** is applied to a liquid crystal display, a rear projector equipment or the like.

Next, the method of manufacturing an optical substrate (a replication mold for a micro lens array) disclosed in Japanese Patent Application Publication No. H10-62604 will be explained briefly, referring to FIGS. 2A to 2C.

A method of manufacturing the optical substrate is actualized in two types depending on whether an etching or sandblasting technique is employed. Hereinafter, these methods are explained in this order.

Firstly, where etching is employed, a photoresist **202** is coated on an upper surface **201a** of a glass substrate **201** as shown in FIG. 2A, and then made into a mask by photolithography. The mask has an opening for an alignment mark portion AM that is to form an alignment mark and an opening for a micro lens portion R that is to form a micro lens.

Next, as shown in FIG. 2B, using the photoresist **202** on the glass substrate **201** as the mask, the glass substrate **201** is etched so as to form the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM therein by wet etching with an HF etchant, or dry etching with carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄) gas.

While the photoresist **202** is removed in the lens portion R during the etching, the photoresist **202** remains in the

alignment mark portion AM since the photoresist **202** is patterned so that the photoresist **202** is not removed in the alignment mark portion AM by etching, as shown in FIG. 2C. After the above procedures are carried out, the optical substrate (namely, a replication mold for a micro lens array) **201** that serves as a mold for manufacturing a micro lens array (not shown) is completed.

Although not illustrated, by filling a transparent resin having a high refractive index into the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM shown in FIG. 2C, a micro lens array is obtained.

On the other hand, when employing the sandblasting, a photosensitive dry film photoresist having a resistance to sandblasting is used as a photoresist **202**. Then, an opening in this dry film is formed in apposition in which the lens portion R should be formed and a position in which the alignment mark part AM should be formed by photolithography. Next, in the sandblasting, the glass substrate **201** is ground physically, thereby forming the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM. Then, the sandblasted surface of the glass substrate **201** in which the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM have been formed is slightly etched by wet etching with the HF etchant or dry etching with the CCl_4 gas, in order to make the surface flat and smooth. With the above procedures, the optical substrate (a replication mold for a micro lens array) **201** that serves as a mold for manufacturing a micro lens array (not shown) is completed.

Although the related-art micro lens array element **100** shown in FIGS. 1A to 1C is able to increase an angle of view when applied to a liquid crystal display, a rear projector or the like, a further increase in the angle of view has been desired.

In addition, when the etching is employed in the related-art method of manufacturing the replication mold as shown in FIGS. 2A to 2C, only a small change in a chemical composition or crystal structure of the substrate **201** may lead to a variation in etching characteristic. When this happens, a desired shape of the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM is no longer obtained. Moreover, when the optical substrate is not sufficiently cleaned immediately after the substrate is etched into a desired shape, it is difficult to maintain the desired shape of a replication mold having a fine lens structure because the remaining etchant may erode the substrate.

When the sandblasting is employed in the related-art method of manufacturing the replication mold, the photosensitive dry film photoresist **202** remains on the substrate after the sandblasting because the dry film photoresist **202** has a resistance to sandblasting, thereby leaving a distance between the adjacent two lens portions R. The distance cannot be eliminated even when etching is carried out in order to smoothen the sandblasted surface of the lens portion R and the alignment mark portion AM, thereby making it difficult to dispose a plural of lens portions R at the highest density.

A micro lens array that enables a further increase in the angle of view rather than the conventional micro lens array and a method of manufacturing a replication mold for such a micro lens array have been desired.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention has been made in view of the above-mentioned circumstances. A first aspect of the present invention provides a micro lens array in which a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two

dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of the micro lenses are protrusively formed along the surface of each micro lens. The micro lens array is configured so that D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3, where D is a micro lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the micro lens when the bottom face of the micro lens is not circular, or is a micro lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the micro lens is circular; D_s is a sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is a sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; and D_{sav} is an average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is an average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s .

A second aspect of the invention provides another micro lens array in which a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of the micro lenses are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens. The micro lens array is configured so that T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more, where D_s is a sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is a sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; D_{sav} is an average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is an average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s ; T_s is a sub-lens height; and T_{sav} is an average height obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens heights T_s .

A third aspect of the present invention provides yet another micro lens array in which a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of the micro lenses are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens. The micro lens array is configured so that D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3 and also T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more, where D_s is a sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is a sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; D_{sav} is an average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is an average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s ; T_s is a sub-lens height; and T_{sav} is an average height obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens heights T_s .

A fourth aspect of the present invention provides a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array in which a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of the micro lenses are protrusively formed on the surface of the micro lens. The method comprises steps of

forming an opening in a mask material at a predetermined spacing and width while covering an area between the openings with a mask portion after providing a mask material having a resistance to blasting on an upper surface of a substrate; forming by blasting fine powder blast abrasive towards the mask material a first concave portion for the micro lens in the exposed portion of the substrate so that the first concave portion has a predetermined depth, and an initial nucleus to be grown into a second concave portion for a sub-lens portion along the inner surface of the micro lens; removing the mask material formed on the upper surface of the substrate, and etching the substrate to cause a periphery of adjacent first concave portions for the micro lens to contact with each other and to form a plural of the second concave portions for the sub-lenses in the first concave portion.

A fifth aspect of the present invention provides a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array in which a plural of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two dimensions. The method comprises steps of forming an opening in a mask material at a predetermined spacing and width while covering an area between the openings with a mask portion after providing a mask material having a resistance to blasting on an upper surface of a substrate; forming by blasting fine powder blast abrasive towards the mask material a concave portion for the micro lens in the exposed portion of the substrate so that the first concave portion has a predetermined depth; removing the mask material formed on the upper surface of the substrate; and etching the substrate to cause the periphery of adjacent concave portions for the micro lenses to contact with each other while smoothing the surface of the concave portion for the micro lens.

According to the micro lens array of the first aspect, there is obtained a micro lens array having a large angle of view since D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3 when a plural of convexly protruded micro lens are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a curvature radius smaller than that of the micro lens are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens, where D is the micro lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the micro lens when the bottom face of the micro lens is not circular, or is the micro lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the micro lens is circular; D_s is the sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is the sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; and D_{sav} is the average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is the average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s . According to this micro lens array, images of high luminosity and high contrast can be realized in a large angle of view when the micro lens array is applied to a liquid crystal display, a rear projector, a screen for a rear projector and the like.

Moreover, according to the micro lens array of the second aspect, there is obtained a micro lens array having a large angle of view since T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more when a plural of convexly protruded micro lens are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a curvature radius smaller than that of this micro lens are

protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens, where D_s is the sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is a sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; D_{sav} is the average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is the average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s ; T_s is the height of the sub-lens; and T_{sav} is the average height obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens heights T_s . According to this micro lens array, images of high luminosity and high contrast can be realized in a large angle of view when the micro lens array is applied to a liquid crystal display, a rear projector, a screen for a rear projector and the like.

Furthermore, according to the micro lens array of the third aspect, there is obtained a micro lens array having a large angle of view since D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3 and also T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more are satisfied when a plural of convexly protruded micro lens are closely arranged in two dimensions and a plural of convex sub-lenses having a curvature radius smaller than that of this micro lens are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens, where D is the micro lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the micro lens when the bottom face of the micro lens is not circular, or is the micro lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the micro lens is circular; D_s is the sub-lens bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along the line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens when the bottom face of the sub-lens is not circular, or is the sub-lens bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens is circular; D_{sav} is the average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s , or is the average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s ; T_s is the height of the sub-lens; and T_{sav} is the average height obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens heights T_s . According to this micro lens array, images of high luminosity and high contrast can be realized in a large angle of view when the micro lens array is applied to a liquid crystal display, a rear projector, a screen for a rear projector and the like.

According to the method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array of the fourth aspect, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed to closely form a plural of concave portions on the upper surface of the substrate and to form a plural of hollows for sub-lenses along the inner surface of each concave portion for a micro lens, the replication mold for manufacturing a micro lens array in which a plural of sub-lenses are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens is obtained conveniently and less costly. Moreover, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed, the replication mold for a micro lens array is obtained at shorter times.

Moreover, according to the method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array of the fifth aspect, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed to closely form a plural of concave portions on the upper surface side of the substrate and further etching is carried out to smooth out a plural of hollows for sub-lenses that have once been

formed along the inner surface of each concave portion for a micro lens, the replication mold for manufacturing a micro lens array in which each micro lens does not have any sub-lenses on the inner surface thereof is obtained conveniently and less costly. Moreover, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed, the replication mold for a micro lens array is obtained at shorter times.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings:

FIGS. 1A, 1B and 1C are a front view, a perspective view, and a bottom view of a related-art micro lens array element, respectively.

FIGS. 2A to 2C are a process chart showing a related-art method of manufacturing an optical substrate (a replication mold for a micro lens array).

FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C are a front view, a perspective view and a bottom view of a micro lens array according to a first embodiment of the present invention, respectively.

FIG. 4 is an explanatory drawing for generally explaining a focal length f of the convex lens having a curvature radius R .

FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of one of micro lenses constituting the micro lens array shown in FIGS. 3A to 3C.

FIGS. 6A and 6B illustrate a dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of D_{sav}/D .

FIGS. 7A and 7B illustrate a dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of T_{sav}/D_{sav} .

FIGS. 8A to 8I are a schematic view illustrating a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens according to the first embodiment.

FIGS. 9A to 9D are a process chart that schematically illustrates process steps of manufacturing a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention using the replication mold for a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 10A and 10B are a measurement result obtained from various micro lens arrays having a respectively different D_{sav} .

FIGS. 11A to 11J are a schematic view illustrating a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens according to the second embodiment of the invention.

FIGS. 12A to 12D are a process chart that schematically illustrates a process step of manufacturing a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention using the replication mold for a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to accompanying drawings, a micro lens array and a method of manufacturing a replication mold for the micro lens array according to the present invention will be explained hereafter.

A First Embodiment

FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C are a front view, a perspective view and a bottom view of a micro lens array according to a first embodiment of the present invention, respectively. FIG. 4 is an explanatory drawing for generally explaining a focal length f of the convex lens having a curvature radius R . FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of one of micro lenses constituting the micro lens array shown in FIGS. 3A to 3C.

As shown in FIGS. 3A to 3C, a micro lens array 12 according to the first embodiment of the present invention is composed of a lens substrate 11 having an optical transparency and a micro lens array formed integrally on an upper surface 11a of the lens substrate 11. The micro lens array 12 is formed of an optically transparent material and the lens substrate 11 has substantially the same optical transparency as this material.

More specifically, the lens substrate 11 serving as a base material for a micro lens array element 10 is formed of a resin substrate having an optical transparency, a transparent glass substrate made of a resin sheet, or the like. The upper and bottom face 11a, 11b of the lens substrate 11 are two dimensionally flat.

In addition, the micro array lens 12 is formed integrally on the upper surface 11a of the optically transparent lens substrate 11 using a transparent resin that allows light to transmit therethrough.

By the way, while the micro lens array element 10 comprised of the lens substrate 11 and the micro lens array 12 will be described hereinafter, only the micro lens array 12 can be formed into substantially the same configuration as stated above using a transparent resin material.

The above-mentioned micro lens array 12 is configured in a way that a plural of convexly protruded micro lens 12a are arranged in two dimensions on the upper surface 11a of the lens substrate 11. In addition, a plural of convex sub-lenses 12b having a smaller radius curvature than that of each micro lens 12a are formed protrusively and integrally along the surface of each micro lens 12a.

By the way, the plural of sub-lenses 12b formed protrusively and integrally along the surface of the micro lens 12a may be referred to as a cluster lens.

Moreover, the plural of sub-lenses 12b formed protrusively and integrally along the surface of one micro lens 12a in the micro lens array 12 have a smaller bottom face area and a lower height than the one micro lens 12a does.

In this embodiment, for convenience of explanation, the convexly protruded micro lenses 12a formed on the surface 11a of the lens substrate 11 are formed into a near hemisphere. In addition, while the bottom face of the micro lens 12a may have a various shape including a circular, an ellipsoid, a polygon, or the like. The micro lens 12a having a substantially hexagonal-shaped bottom face is explained in this embodiment.

When each micro lens 12a among the micro lens array 12 is protruded into a near hemisphere shape having a radius curvature R , for example, the plural of micro lenses 12a are disposed in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement in order to arrange the micro lenses 12a at the highest density when seen from the bottom face 11b of the lens substrate 11. When the plural of micro lenses 12a are disposed in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement, a pitch P_x along the X-axis in FIG. 1C is given as $2R \cos 30$ degree. Also, a pitch P_y along the Y-axis in FIG. 1C is given as $R + R \sin 30$ degree, because another micro lens 12a is placed along the X-axis between the adjacent two micro lenses 12a disposed along the X-axis. When seen from the bottom of the micro lenses 12a protruded into substantially a near hemisphere, they are arranged with no space between.

By the way, while the plural of micro lenses 12a are provided in the micro lens array 12 in a way that they are disposed in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement, the micro lens array 12 can be obtained by disposing the micro lenses 12a into another polygonal arrangement instead.

In addition, the micro lens array **12** can be obtained by disposing the plural of micro lenses **12a** having a circular bottom of a diameter $2R$ in a circular arrangement at the highest density. In this highest density arrangement, since the plural of micro lenses **12a** come into a contact with the adjacent micro lenses **12a** at its circumference (not shown), leaving a little space between the adjacent micro lenses, the density at which the plural of micro lenses **12** are packed becomes lower than the density at which they are packed hexagonally. However, the pitch P_x along the X-axis is $2R$ and the pitch P_y along the Y-axis is $2R \sin 60$ degree, because another micro lens **12a** is disposed along the X-axis between the adjacent two micro lenses **12a** disposed along the Y-axis. In this case, the micro lenses **12a** protruded in a shape of substantially a hemisphere are closely packed with only a little space between.

Here, it is assumed that a commonly used convex lens CL having a curvature radius R is formed with its center on a central point O ; this convex lens CL is used in the atmosphere; and the refractive index of the convex lens CL is n' , as shown in FIG. 4. When collimated light L is incident upon the convex lens CL and converges at a point V on an optical axis K , a focal length f is given as the distance between an apex U of the convex lens CL and the point V on the optical axis K of the convex lens CL. The focal length f is expressed as:

$$f = n'R / (n' - n). \quad (1)$$

Here, n is a refraction index of air ($=1$); and n' is a refraction index of a glass material ($=1.5$) when a glass material is used for the convex lens CL. When the values of n and n' are substituted into the equation (1), the focal length f of the convex lens CL is obtained as $3R$.

From the above discussion, the smaller the radius curvature becomes, the shorter the focal length becomes, thereby increasing an angle θ (theta) at which the light is refracted by the convex lens CL. As a result, an angle of view is increased.

As shown in FIG. 5, when one micro lens **12a** in the micro lens array **12** is protruded into a near hemisphere shape having a radius curvature R and a height T with its center on the central point O , a radius curvature R_s of the sub-lens **12b** protruded in a shape of a near hemisphere with its center on the central point O_s is smaller than that of the micro lens **12a**, supposing that a height T_s of the convex sub-lens **12b** formed along the surface of the micro lens **12a** is set so that T_s is in a range from $T/10$ to $T/2$, for example.

From the principle explained with reference to FIG. 4, the focal length f of one micro lens **12a** is $3R$ and the focal length f_s of the sub-lens **12b** is $3R_s$, thereby satisfying the relation: $f = 3R > f_s = 3R_s$. Also, a relation between the θ (theta) and θ_s (theta s) at which light is refracted by the micro lens **12a** and by the sub-lens **12b**, respectively is θ (theta) $<$ θ_s (theta s).

Accordingly, the micro lens **12a** having sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface thereof is able to provide a larger angle of view than that having no sub-lenses. As a result, the micro lens array **12** having a larger angle of view is realized when such a micro lens **12a** is applied thereto.

Although the sub-lens **12b** as well as the micro lens **12a** has to be formed into substantially a convex shape for the purpose of increasing an angle of view, all the sub-lenses **12** protruded along the surface of each micro lens **12a** do not necessarily have the same shape. Also the sub-lenses **12b** may have not a near hemisphere but an aspheric shape.

When the micro lens array **12** is made using a micro lens array replication mold **21** (FIG. 9) according to the first embodiment of the present invention (described later), while the plural of sub-lenses **12b** protrusively formed along the surface of each micro lens **12a** have a smaller bottom face area than the micro lens **12a** does, the plural of the sub-lenses **12b** tend to be formed so as to have a respectively different bottom face area from another.

Here, the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** is a virtual surface defined by borderlines between one micro lens **12a** and a plural of its adjacent micro lenses in FIG. 3A. In addition, the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** is a virtual surface defined by borderlines between one sub-lens **12b** and a plural of its adjacent sub-lenses **12b** in FIG. 5. However, as shown in FIG. 5, when the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** is not flat but curved, the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** is an apparent surface of the micro lens **12a** when seen from the central point O of the radius curvature to the apex of the micro lens **12a**. Also, when the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** is not flat but curved, the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** is an apparent surface of the sub-lens **12b** when seen from the central point O_s of the radius curvature to the apex of the sub-lens **12b**.

In addition, a design condition that realizes a large angle of view is determined by a ratio of D_{sav}/D where D is the micro lens **12a** bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** when the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** is not circular, or is a micro lens **12a** bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** is circular; D_s is a sub-lens **12b** bottom face width obtained by halving the summation of the maximum and the minimum width which are measured along a line passing through the center of the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** when the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** is not circular, or is a sub-lens **12b** bottom face diameter when the bottom face of the sub-lens **12b** is circular; and D_{sav} is an average sub-lens **12b** bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens **12b** bottom face widths D_s , or is an average sub-lens **12b** bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens **12b** bottom face diameters D_s , taking account of various bottom face shapes such as circular, an ellipsoid, a polygon or the like when easily obtaining a relation between a bottom face area of one micro lens **12a** and a bottom face area of one sub-lens **12b**.

By the way, the line mentioned above is a virtual straight line drawn so as to pass through the center of the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** (or sub-lens **12b**) and to be along the bottom face of the micro lens **12a** (or sub-lens **12b**).

A dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of D_{sav}/D will be explained with reference to FIGS. 6A and 6B.

FIGS. 6A and 6B illustrate a dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of D_{sav}/D . FIG. 6A illustrates the dependence when the bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D of the micro lens **12a** is 90 micrometers and the average height T_{sav} of the height T_s of the sub-lens **12b** protrusively formed along the surface of the micro lens **12a** is 3 micrometers. FIG. 6B illustrates the dependence when the bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D of the micro lens **12a** is 130 micrometers and the average height T_{sav} of the height T_s of the sub-lens **12b** protrusively formed along the surface of the micro lens **12a** is 4 micrometers.

The bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D of the micro lens and the bottom face width (or the bottom face

diameter) D_s of the sub-lens are measured with a laser microscope VK-8500 (KEYENCE). The gain and the view angle of half intensity are measured with a goniophotometer GP-200 (Murakami Color Research Laboratory Tokyo).

By the way, the above-mentioned gain value is obtained as a value relative to the gain of 1.0 obtained for a perfectly diffusing board. The above-mentioned view angle of half intensity is an angle at which the gain becomes half of the peak gain value.

As shown in FIGS. 6A and 6B, as apparent from a change in the gain and view angle of half intensity with respect to D_{sav}/D , the gain obtained for the micro lens having the sub-lenses 12b is almost the same as or slightly lower than that obtained for the micro lens having no sub-lenses 12b. However, such a difference places no significant impact on a practical use of the micro lens array. On the other hand, the view angle of half intensity in the micro lens having the sub-lenses 12b is higher than that in the micro lens having no sub-lenses when D_{sav}/D is more than 0.1 (inclusive) and less than 0.3 (inclusive), thereby realizing the micro lens array 12 having a wider view angle.

Moreover, a larger angle of view is realized depending on a ratio of T_{sav}/D_{sav} when D_{sav} is defined as an average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging the sub-lens bottom face width D_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses 12b formed along the surface of the micro lens 12a or an average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging the sub-lens bottom face diameter of each of the plural of sub-lenses 12b, and T_{sav} is defined as an average height obtained by averaging the height T_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses 12b.

A dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of T_{sav}/D_{sav} will be explained with reference to FIGS. 7A and 7B.

FIGS. 7A and 7B illustrate a dependence of a view angle of half intensity and gain on a ratio of T_{sav}/D_{sav} . FIG. 7A illustrates the dependence when the bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D of the micro lens is 90 micrometers and the average height T_{sav} of the height T_s of the sub-lens 12b protrusively formed along the surface of the micro lens 12a is 3 micrometers. FIG. 7B illustrates the dependence when the bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D of the micro lens is 130 micrometers and the average height T_{sav} of the height T_s of the sub-lens 12b protrusively formed along the surface of the micro lens 12a is 4 micrometers.

The bottom face width (or the bottom face diameter) D_s of the sub-lens and the height T_s of the plural of the sub-lens 12b are measured with a laser microscope VK-8500 (KEYENCE). The gain and the view angle of half intensity are measured with a goniophotometer GP-200 (Murakami Color Research Laboratory Tokyo).

By the way, the above-mentioned gain value is obtained as a value relative to the gain of 1.0 obtained for a perfectly diffusing board. The above-mentioned view angle of half intensity is an angle at which the gain becomes half of the peak gain value.

As shown in FIGS. 7A and 7B, as apparent from a change in the gain and view angle of half intensity with respect to T_{sav}/D_{sav} , the gain obtained for the micro lens having the sub-lenses 12b is almost the same as or slightly lower than that obtained for the micro lens having no sub-lenses 12b. However, such a difference places no significant impact on a practical use of the micro lens array. On the other hand, the view angle of half intensity in the micro lens having the sub-lenses 12b is higher than that in the micro lens having

no sub-lenses when T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more, thereby realizing the micro lens array 12 having a larger angle of view.

Furthermore, while FIGS. 6A, 6B and FIGS. 7A, 7B illustrate a micro lens in which D_{sav}/D is in a range from 0.1 to 0.3, and T_{sav}/D_{sav} is 0.1 or more, respectively, it is apparent that the micro lens array 12 having much larger view angle of half intensity is obtained when both relations are satisfied.

Next, a method of manufacturing a micro lens array replication mold for the micro lens array 12 (FIGS. 3 and 5) according to the first embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to FIGS. 8A to 8I.

In this embodiment, a method of manufacturing a micro lens replication mold for a micro lens array 12 (FIGS. 3 and 5) in which a plural of micro lenses 12a (FIGS. 3 and 5) protruded in a shape of a near hemisphere having a radius curvature of R , for example, are disposed two-dimensionally in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement, and a plural of convex sub-lenses 12b having a smaller radius curvature than the micro lens 12a are formed protrusively along the surface of each micro lens 12a. However, a method of manufacturing a micro lens replication mold for a micro lens in which the bottom face of the micro lens 12a can have a various shape including a circular, an ellipsoid, and a polygon is also realized, for example.

FIGS. 8A to 8I are a schematic view illustrating a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens according to the first embodiment.

In the method of manufacturing a replication mold according to the first embodiment of the present invention, firstly, a substrate 21 is prepared as a base material for a replication mold for a micro lens according to the first embodiment. In this case, the substrate 21 is preferably formed of a glass or a ceramic substrate that is easily ground in a blast-grinding process described hereinafter. The substrate 21 has a flat upper surface 21a.

In a photosensitive film attaching process illustrated in FIG. 8A, a photosensitive film 22 (referred to a dry film hereinafter) made by forming an ultra violet light hardening (UV-hardening) resin into a shape of film is pressed onto the upper surface 21a of the substrate 21 and heated to be attached thereon. The dry film is a mask material having a resistance to fine powder blast abrasive 28 (FIG. 8E) used in a blast-grinding process described hereinafter.

The method will hereinafter be explained while illustrating the two-dimensional substrate 21 seen from the direction of the X-axis.

Next, in a negative mask placing process illustrated in FIG. 8B, a negative mask 23 that has alternatively a black portion 23a for blocking light and a transparent portion 23b for allowing light to pass therethrough is placed on the dry film 22.

The black portion 23a of the negative mask 23 is arranged in a position where a concave for forming the micro lens 12a (FIGS. 3 and 5) having a radius curvature R that constitutes the micro lens array 12 (FIGS. 3 and 5) has to be made in the substrate 21. A pitch P_x of the black portions 23a along the X-axis is set to be $2R \cos 30$ degree as mentioned above. A width A_x along the X-axis is set to be smaller than the pitch P_x . On the other hand, the transparent portion 23b of the negative mask 23 is formed between adjacent two black portions 23a. The transparent portion 23b has a width of $(P_x - A_x)$.

Then, in an exposing process illustrated in FIG. 8C, ultraviolet light 24 is irradiated towards the negative mask 23 from above. The ultraviolet light 24 does not penetrate the black portions 23a of the negative mask 23 but does the

transparent portions **23b**. Therefore, the ultraviolet light **24** creates an unexposed portion (unhardened portion) **22a** in a position corresponding to the black portion **23a** of the negative mask **23** and an exposed portion (hardened portion) **22b** in a position corresponding to the transparent portion **23b** of the negative mask **23**.

In a developing process illustrated in FIG. 8D, after the negative mask **23** (not shown in FIG. 8D) is removed, diluted sodium carbonate (Na_2CO_3) is sprayed towards the dry film **22** from a developer container **25** placed over the dry film **22**. The diluted sodium carbonate removes the unexposed portion **22a** of the dry film **22** by making the portion **22a** swollen, thereby leaving an opening **22a1** having the width Ax . On the other hand, the exposed portion **22b** formed between adjacent two openings remains on the substrate **21**, thereby serving as a mask portion against the fine powder blast abrasive **28** (FIG. 8E) described hereinafter. It should be noted that the openings **22a1** formed side-by-side in the dry film **23** maintain the above-stated pitch of Px .

Next, in an early stage of a blast-grinding process illustrated in FIG. 8E, the fine powder blast abrasive **28** are blasted at high speed from a blast nozzle **27** placed above the dry film **22** towards the dry film **22** in a way that an amount of the abrasive **28** to be blasted per unit time is kept constant. In this situation, while each exposed portion **22b** of the dry film **22** remains to serve as a mask to block the fine powder blast abrasive **28**, the fine powder blast abrasive **28** passes through each opening **22a1** of the dry film **22** and collides with the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21**. Accordingly, the fine powder blast abrasive **28** grinds a portion of the substrate **21**, the portion having the same width as the width Ax of the opening **22a1** of the dry film **22**, so as to form a concave portion **21b** for a micro lens.

Next, in an ending stage of a blast-grinding process illustrated in FIG. 8F, in which the blast-grinding has further progressed, each concave portion **21b** as a first concave portion for a micro lens is formed on the upper surface **21** side of the substrate **21** by the fine powder blast abrasive **28** until the depth of the concave portion **21b** reaches a predetermined depth of H , where the predetermined depth H of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens corresponds to the height T (FIG. 5) of each micro lens **12a** (FIGS. 3 and 5) to be formed. The depth is determined in advance when each micro lens **12a** (FIGS. 3 and 5) is designed.

In the both stages of the blast-grinding process, while a penetration depth to which the fine powder blast abrasive **28** that has passed through the opening **22a1** after passing through the opening **22a1** can penetrate into the concave portion of the substrate **21** is deeper around the center **21b1** of each concave portion **21** for a micro lens, the depth is rather shallower in the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3** of the concave portion **21b** because the abrasive **28** undergoes a resistance in the areas.

The fine powder blast abrasive **28** that has reached the center **21b1** of each concave portion **21b** moves towards the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3** and exits out of the concave portion **21b** from the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3**.

Under these circumstances, an amount of the fine powder blast abrasive **28** that reaches the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3** of the concave portion **21b** in the substrate **21** from the blast nozzle **26** becomes less along the radius of the concave portion **21**. This is because such abrasive **28** that reaches the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3** undergoes a resistance from the fine powder blast abrasive **28** that reaches the center **21b1**, moves towards the peripheral areas **21b2**, **21b3**, and exits

out from the peripheral areas. Therefore, the concave portions **21** for micro lenses are formed into a near hemispherical shape.

Also, a shape of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens to be formed on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21** depends on blasting conditions, it is necessary to find out the optimal blasting conditions in order to obtain a predetermined shape. A diameter of the fine powder blast abrasive **28** should be determined according to a predetermined depth H of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens. In order to improve a grinding performance, the particle diameter needs to be $H/6$ or less with respect to the predetermined depth H of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens. In addition, it is preferable when there are variations in the particle diameter of the fine powder blast abrasive **28** in order to easily form a hollow for sub-lenses in the inner surface of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens as described hereinafter. In case the predetermined depth H of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is for example 25 to 50 micrometers and the substrate **21** is formed of glass, white alumina of #1000 to #3000 (Japanese Industrial Standards (JIS) R6001) is suitable as the abrasive **28**.

When each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is ground approximately to the predetermined depth of H on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21**, a plural of fine hollows **21c1** are formed along the inner surface of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens. The fine hollows do not always have the same area or size because of a variation in the particle diameter of the fine powder blast abrasive **28**. The plural of fine hollows obtained here serves as an initial nucleus of a hollow **21c3** (FIG. 8I) for sub-lenses, as described hereinafter. By the way, the predetermined depth H of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens cannot be measured precisely because there are fine hollows **21c1** on the inner surface thereof.

Next, in an early stage of an etching process illustrated in FIG. 8G, firstly, the dry film **22** (not shown in this figure) is removed from the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21**. At this time, the substrate **21** has each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens formed by grinding the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21**, the portion **21b** having a width $Ax1$ and nearly the predetermined depth H , and a plural of the fine hollows **21c1** formed along the inner surface of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens, the hollows **21c1** not having the same size. Then, the substrate **21** is etched from the upper surface **21a** side.

The etching performed here may be either wet or dry etching. When employing wet etching, HF etchant, for example, is suitable for a glass substrate as the substrate **21** and the pH and temperature thereof can control the etching rate of the substrate **21**. On the other hand, when employing dry etching, carbon tetrachloride (CCl_4) is suitable as an etching gas, for example.

When either wet or dry etching is carried out, the etching conditions have to be set in advance so as to realize isotropic etching characteristic and controlled so that the predetermined depth H of the concave portion **21** for a micro lens formed by blast-grinding the substrate **21** remains constant even after the etching.

Next, in a mid stage of the etching process illustrated in FIG. 8H, when the substrate **21** is further etched by wet or dry etching, the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21** and the inside of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens are etched simultaneously. At this time, the pitch Px between adjacent two concave portions **21b** formed on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21** is kept unchanged and a depth of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is kept

substantially at a predetermined depth of H. In addition, although the width Ax2 of the concave portion 21b for a micro lens becomes wider than the width Ax1 illustrated in FIG. 8G due to the etching, any adjacent two concave portions 21b have not yet contacted with each other.

Moreover, in the mid stage of the etching process, some of somewhat larger fine hollows 21c1 among the fine hollows 21c that have been formed along the inner surface of the concave portion 21b of the substrate 21, the fine hollows 21c not having the size, are grown into a larger hollows 21c2 while merging in other somewhat smaller fine hollows and hence decreasing the number of the fine hollows 21c. Some of the larger hollows 21c2 serve as an initial nucleus to be grown into a hollow for a sub-lens.

Then, when the etching further progresses, the process comes into an end stage of the etching process illustrated in FIG. 8I. At this stage, while the upper surface 21a side of the substrate 21 and the inside of the concave portion 21b for a micro lens are further etched, the pitch Px between adjacent two concave portions 21b formed on the upper surface 21b side of the substrate 21 and the predetermined depth H remain almost unchanged. However, a width Ax3 of each concave portion 21b for a micro lens becomes wider than the width Ax2 illustrated in FIG. 8H and thereby the adjacent two concave portions 21b have come into a contact with each other. Then, the etching process ends. At this time, since the adjacent two concave portions 21b are connected with each other, a plural of concave portions 21b for micro lenses having a near hemisphere shape come to be disposed closely in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement on the upper surface 21a of the substrate 21.

As illustrated in FIG. 8I, a total etching amount E from the early to the end stage of the etching process is determined by the pitch Px of the adjacent two concave portions 21b for micro lenses and the width Ax1 (FIG. 8G) of the concave portions 21b for micro lenses, the width Ax1 being an width before etching. That is, the amount E of the upper surface 21a side of the substrate 21 is expressed in the following equation:

$$E=(Px-Ax1)/2 \quad (2)$$

During the etching process, since some of larger hollows 21c2 formed along the inner surface of the concave portions 21b for micro lenses in the substrate 21 are merged out, a plural of further large hollows 21c3 are finally formed along the inner surface of each concave portion 21b for a micro lens. The further large hollows 21c3 serve to form a plural of sub-lenses 12b (FIGS. 3 and 5) along the surface of micro lenses 21a (FIGS. 3 and 5).

The plural of hollows 21c3 for sub-lenses (a second concave portion) are smaller than the concave portion 21b (a first concave portion) and an area defined by the hollow 21c3 for sub-lenses is smaller than that by the concave portion 21b for a micro lens.

The substrate 21 that has undergone the etching process is now a replication mold for a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

Next, a manufacturing process for the micro lens array 12 (FIGS. 3 and 5) using the replication mold (the substrate 21) according to the first embodiment of the present invention will be described hereinafter with reference to FIGS. 9A to 9D, the mold having been produced by the above-mentioned method.

FIGS. 9A to 9D are a process chart that schematically illustrates process steps of manufacturing a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention

using the replication mold for a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

Firstly, in a UV-hardening resin dispense process illustrated in FIG. 9A, the replication mold 21 (the substrate 21) for a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention includes a plural of hollows 21c3 for sub-lenses along the inner surface of each concave portion 21b formed on the upper surface 21a (not shown) thereof. To this replication mold 21 are dispensed a UV-hardening resin 31 from above. Though not shown, the replication mold 21 has a blocking member at the periphery thereof that prevents the UV-hardening resin 31 from flowing down therefrom.

Then, in a lens substrate disposing process illustrated in FIG. 9B, a lens substrate 11 is placed onto the UV-hardening resin 31 that has been dispensed over the replication mold 21 (the substrate 21) for a micro lens array. When the lens substrate 11 is placed, the flat upper surface (i.e., a lower surface in FIG. 9B) thereof presses and spreads the UV-hardening resin 31 evenly into each concave portion 21b for a micro lens and the hollows 21c3 for sub-lenses.

Next, in a UV light exposing process illustrated in FIG. 9C, the UV-hardening resin 31 is hardened by exposing UV-light 32 from above the lens substrate 11. With this, the shape of each concave portion 21b for a micro lens formed in the replication mold 21 (the substrate 21) for a micro lens array and also the shape of the plural of hollows 21c3 for sub-lenses formed in the inner surface of each concave portion 21b for a micro lens are replicated to the UV-hardening resin 31.

Then, in a mold removing process illustrated in FIG. 9D, when the replication mold 21 (not shown) is peeled off from the hardened UV-hardening resin 31, the micro lens array 12 according to the first embodiment of the present invention is obtained. The micro lens array 12 includes a plural of micro lenses 12a that have been formed corresponding to the concave portion 21b for a micro lens, the micro lenses 12a protruding on the upper surface 11a (i.e., a lower surface in FIG. 9D) of the lens substrate 11 and a plural of sub-lenses 12b that have been formed corresponding to the hollows 21c3, the sub-lenses 12b protruding slightly from the surface of each micro lens 12a. The height T of each micro lens 12a in the micro lens array 12 is substantially the same as the predetermined depth H of the concave portion 21b for a micro lens in the lens substrate 11. Also, the height Ts of the sub-lens 12b is substantially the same of the depth of the hollows 21c3 for sub-lenses. After undergoing the above procedures, a micro lens array element 10 is completed.

By the way, in manufacturing the micro lens array 12 above, while the micro lens array 12 is formed integrally with the lens substrate 11, a removable plate having a flat surface to be contacted with the UV-hardening resin can be used to press the resin instead of the lens substrate 11. With such a plate, a micro lens array element having no lens substrate is obtained.

Next, the method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array, according to the first embodiment of the present invention, will be described in detail with reference to examples 1 and 2. Each constituent element or member to be used in the examples 1, 2 is given the same reference mark as in FIGS. 8 and 9, thereby omitting a process chart of the method in the following examples.

EXAMPLE 1

Firstly, a soda glass substrate 21 having a thickness of 3 mm was prepared as a starting material for a replication mold for a micro lens array. Then, a dry film 22 of 50

micrometer thick was pressed onto the upper surface **21a** of the soda glass substrate **21** and heated to be attached thereon.

Next, a negative mask **23** having alternatively a black portion **23a** for blocking light and a transparent portion **23b** for allowing light to pass therethrough was placed on the dry film **22**. In the negative mask **23**, a pitch P_x between adjacent two black portions **23a** was set, for example, to be 90 micrometers. By the way, a plural of negative masks **23** having the same pitch P_x of 90 micrometers and a respectively different width A_x along the X-axis of each black portion **23a** were prepared in advance.

Then, UV-light **24** was exposed to the negative mask **23** from above, thereby forming an unexposed (unhardened) portion **22a** at a position in the dry film **22**, the position corresponding to each black portion **23a**, and an exposed position (hardened) portion **22a** at a position in the dry film **22**, the position corresponding to each transparent portion **23a**.

Next, the negative mask **23** was removed from the dry film **22** and the dry film **22** was cleaned using 10% sodium carbonate. Due to the cleaning, the unexposed portions **22a** of the dry film **22** was removed, thereby forming an opening **22a1** having a width A_x . On the other hand, the exposed portion **22b** of the dry film **22** remained on the soda glass substrate **21**, thereby obtaining a mask to be used in a blast-grinding process described hereinafter.

Fine powder abrasive **28** (white aluminum, #1500 (JIS R6001)) was blasted out from a blast nozzle **27** placed above the dry film **22** towards the dry film **22** and the fine powder blast abrasive **28** that passed through the openings **22a1** ground the upper surface **21a** side of the soda glass substrate **21**, thereby forming concave portions **21b** for micro lenses, the concave portions **21b** having a near hemisphere shape a pitch of P_x between their adjacent ones. The upper surface **21a** of the soda glass substrate **21** was ground until the depth H of each micro lens concave portion **21b** became equal to the height T (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of the micro lens **12a** to be formed.

Then, after the dry film **22** was removed from the soda glass substrate **21**, the upper surface **21a** of the soda glass substrate **21** and the concave portion **21b** were etched with an HF etchant. During the etching, a plural of fine hollows **21c1** were formed and then grown gradually to be larger (see **21c1**, **21c2**, and **21c3** in FIGS. 8G, 8H, and 8I, respectively), thereby obtaining a hollow **21c3** for sub-lenses. When the etching of the upper surface **21a** of the soda glass substrate **21** continues until an etching amount E becomes $(P_x - A_x)/2$, the concave portions **21b** for micro lenses were grown to contact with the adjacent ones and disposed in a hexagonal close-packed arranged. The soda glass substrate **21** was now a replication mold for a micro lens array according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

Next, a UV-light hardening resin **31** was dispensed onto the replication mold **21** (the soda glass substrate **21**) for a micro lens array, and a poly carbonate film **11** having a thickness of 30 micrometers was laid as a lens substrate on the UV-light hardening resin **31**. Then, the UV-light **31** was exposed to the UV-hardening resin **31** through the polycarbonate film **11** from above, thereby hardening the UV-light hardening resin **31**. After the replication mold **21** (the soda glass substrate **21**) for a micro lens array was peeled off, each micro lens **12a** was protrusively formed on the upper surface **11a** side of the polycarbonate film **11** in accordance with each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens. Also, corresponding to the plural of hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses, a plural of sub-lenses **12b** were formed to slightly protrude

from the surface of each micro lens **12a**. After all the procedures above the micro lens array **12** according to this invention was completed.

In Example 1, while the pitch P_x of the opening **22a1** formed in the dry film **22** along the X-axis direction was maintained at 90 micrometers for example, the average sub-lens bottom face width (or the average sub-lens bottom face diameter) D_{sav} of the plural of sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface of the micro lens **12** formed by using the soda glass substrate **21** was controlled by changing the width A_x of the opening **22a1**. The measurement result obtained from various micro lens arrays having a respectively different D_{sav} was shown in FIG. 10A. In FIG. 10A, D is the micro lens bottom face width (or the micro lens bottom face diameter) and D_{sav} was the average sub-lens bottom face width (or the average sub-lens bottom face diameter) obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s .

From FIG. 10A, it was found that when the width A_x of the openings **22a1** in the dry film **22** was changed, the micro lens bottom face width (the micro lens bottom face diameter) D remains almost constant at 90 micrometers for example and thus the adjacent two micro lenses **12a** were in contact with each other. In addition, the height T (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of each micro lens **12a** was about half of the above-mentioned micro lens bottom face width (the micro lens bottom face diameter) D .

On the other hand, the average sub-lens bottom face width D_{sav} obtained by averaging the sub-lens bottom face width D_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface of each micro lens **12b**, or the average sub-lens bottom face diameter D_{sav} obtained by averaging the sub-lens bottom face diameter D_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface of each micro lens **12b** becomes smaller as the width A_x of the opening **22a1** in the dry film **22** increases. In addition, the height T_s (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of each sub-lens **12b** was about one fifth to one twentieth of the above-mentioned average sub-lens bottom face width (the average sub-lens bottom face diameter) D_{sav} .

By the way, the gain and view angle of half intensity of the micro lens arrays obtained in Example 1 were substantially the same as in FIG. 6A.

EXAMPLE 2

In Example 2, the micro lens array was manufactured in the same way as Example 1 except that the pitch P_x of the openings **22a1** in the dry film **22** was set to be 30 micrometers. The results are listed in FIG. 10B. In FIG. 10B, D is the micro lens bottom face width or the micro lens bottom face diameter as described above, and D_{sav} is the average sub-lens bottom face width obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face widths D_s or the average sub-lens bottom face diameter obtained by averaging a plural of the sub-lens bottom face diameters D_s .

From FIG. 10B, it is found that substantially the same result as Example 1 is obtained. In other words, when the width of opening **22a1** in the dry film **22** is changed, the micro lens bottom face width (micro lens bottom face diameter) D remains substantially constant at 130 micrometers for example. This result suggests that any adjacent two micro lens **12a** be in a close contact with each other. In addition, the height T (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of each micro lens **12a** is about half of the above-mentioned micro lens bottom face width (micro lens bottom face diameter) D .

On the other hand, it has been found that the average sub-lens bottom face width D_{sav} obtained by averaging the

sub-lens bottom face width D_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface of each micro lens **12b**, or the average sub-lens bottom face diameter D_{sav} obtained by averaging the sub-lens bottom face diameter D_s of each of the plural of sub-lenses **12b** formed along the surface of each micro lens **12b** becomes smaller as the width Ax of the opening **22a1** in the dry film **22** increases. In addition, the height T_s (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of each sub-lens **12b** is about one fifth to one twentieth of the above-mentioned average sub-lens bottom face width (the average sub-lens bottom face diameter) D_{sav} .

By the way, the gain and view angle of half intensity of the micro lens arrays obtained in Example 2 are the same as in FIG. 6B.

<Comparison 1>

By way of comparison, a micro lens array was produced in the same conditions as Example 1 except that the pitch Px of the adjacent two opening **22a1** in the dry film **22** is set to be 25 micrometers. An etching amount is 75 micrometers and no sub-lenses were formed in the micro lens array for comparison.

<Comparison 2>

By way of comparison, a micro lens array was produced in the same conditions as Example 2 except that the pitch Px of the adjacent two opening **22a1** in the dry film **22** is set to be 55 micrometers. An etching amount is 75 micrometers and no sub-lenses were formed in the micro lens array for comparison.

According to a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array of the first embodiment of the present invention stated above, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed to closely form a plural of concave portions **21b** on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21** and to form a plural of hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses along the surface of each concave portion for a micro lens, a replication mold for a micro lens array for manufacturing a micro lens array **12** in which a plural of sub-lenses **12b** are protrusively formed on the surface of each micro lens **12a** is obtained conveniently and less costly. Moreover, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed, the replication mold for a micro lens array is obtained at shorter times.

Second Embodiment

FIGS. 11A to 11J are a schematic view illustrating a method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens according to the second embodiment of the invention.

In the method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens according to the second embodiment, substantially the same technical idea as in the first embodiment is adopted. That is, in the method, a plural of concave portions **21b** for micro lenses are formed by blast-grinding the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21'** as a starting material for a replication mold for a micro lens array **12'** (FIG. 12D). However, the method according to the second embodiment is characterized in that a plural of hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses, the hollows **21c3** being formed along the inner surface of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens by blast-grinding and etching, is further etched and thus removed completely, thereby forming a plural of concave portions **21b** for micro lenses, without any hollows for sub-lenses, on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21'**.

Although a reference mark **21'** is given to the substrate in FIGS. 11A to 11J in the second embodiment while the substrate used in the first embodiment is referred to as the reference mark **21**, procedures illustrated in FIGS. 11A to

11F are substantially the same as those illustrated in FIGS. **8A** to **8F** in the first embodiment. The same procedures as shown in the first embodiment are not mentioned in the second embodiment and only an etching process that is different from that in the first embodiment will be explained with reference to FIGS. **11G** to **11J**.

In an early stage of an etching process illustrated in FIG. **11G**, an upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21'** is blast-ground by fine powder blast abrasive **28** (not shown) so that each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is formed so as to have a width Ax and a predetermined depth H . Then, the substrate **21'** including a plural of fine hollows **21c1** not having the same size along the inner surface of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is wet or dry etched from the upper surface **21a** side. Although the predetermined depth H of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens is substantially the same as the height T (FIGS. 5 and 9D) of the micro lens **12a** in the micro lens array **12** (FIGS. 3, 5 and 9D) in the first embodiment, the depth H is set to be slightly greater than the height T' of the micro lens **12a** in the micro lens array **12'** (FIG. 12D) (described hereinafter) in the second embodiment.

Then, in a first mid stage of the etching process illustrated in FIG. **11H**, when the substrate **21'** is further etched by wet or dry etching, the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21'** and the inside of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens are etched. At this time, the pitch Px of the adjacent two concave portions **21b** for micro lenses formed on the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21'** remains almost constant. In addition, in each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens, the predetermined depth H remains unchanged. Although the width $Ax2$ of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens becomes slightly larger than the width illustrated in FIG. **11G**, the width $Ax2$ still exists so as to prevent the adjacent two concave portions **21b** for micro lenses from being contact with each other.

Moreover, in the etching process mentioned above, some of somewhat larger fine hollows among the fine hollows **21c1** formed along the inner surface of the concave portion **21b** of the substrate **21'**, the fine hollows **21c1** not having the same size, are grown into a larger hollows **21c2** while merging in other fine hollows **21c1** and thus decreasing the number of the fine hollows **21c**. Some of the larger hollows **21c2** serve as an initial nucleus to be grown into a hollow for a sub-lens.

Next, in a second mid stage of an etching process illustrated in FIG. **11I**, the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **12'** and the inside of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens are etched further. At this time, the pitch Px of the adjacent two micro lenses formed on the upper surface **21a** side of the substrate **21'** remains constant. In addition, in each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens, the predetermined depth H is maintained. However, the width $Ax3$ of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens becomes larger than $Ax2$ illustrated in FIG. **11H** and thereby the adjacent two concave portions **21b** are in contact with each other. Then, the plural of the concave portions **21b** for micro lenses are closely disposed in a hexagonal close-packed (honeycomb) arrangement, the concave portions **21b** having a near hemisphere shape. At this time, a total etching amount from the early to the second mid stage of the etching process amounts to E .

In addition, during the above-mentioned etching process, some of the plural of larger hollows **21c2** formed along the inner surface of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens in the substrate **21'** are merged. As a result, a plural of further larger hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses are formed along the inner surface of each concave portion **21b**. While the etching

21

process is completed at this stage in the first embodiment, further etching is carried out in the second embodiment.

When the substrate **21'** illustrated in FIG. **11I** is further etched, the process comes to an ending stage illustrated in FIG. **11J**. In this stage, because of continued etching, the plural of the hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses formed along the inner surface of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens in the substrate **21'** disappear. Therefore, there are formed only the concave portions **21b** that have a near hemisphere shape with a smooth inner surface. Although the width **Ax4** of each concave portion **21b** becomes larger than the width **Ax3** illustrated in FIG. **11I**, the pitch **Px** of the adjacent two concave portions **21b** for micro lenses remains unchanged. The adjacent two concave portions **21b** are in contact with each other. A total etching amount from the early to the ending stage of the etching process is now equal to **E'**. Although the etching amount **E'** is apparently larger than the amount **E** illustrated in FIG. **11I**, the predetermined depth **H** of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens remains substantially unchanged.

Then, the substrate **21'** that have undergone the above-mentioned etching process is now a replication mold for a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention.

Next, a manufacturing process for the micro lens array using the replication mold **21'** (the substrate **21'**) made by the above-mentioned method according to the second embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to FIGS. **12A** to **12D**.

FIGS. **12A** to **12D** are a process chart that schematically illustrates a process step of manufacturing a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention using the replication mold for a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention.

Firstly, in a UV-hardening resin dispense process illustrated in FIG. **12A**, the replication mold **21'** (the substrate **21'**) for a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention includes a plural of concave portions **21b** for micro lenses that are closely arranged on the upper surface **21a** (not shown) thereof. In addition, each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens has a predetermined depth **H**. The UV-hardening resin **31** is dispensed onto the replication mold **21** from above.

Then, in a lens substrate disposing process illustrated in FIG. **12B**, a lens substrate **11** is placed onto the UV-hardening resin **31** dispensed over the replication mold **21'** (the substrate **21'**) for a micro lens array. When the lens substrate **11** is placed, the flat upper surface (lower in FIG. **9B**) thereof presses and spreads the UV-hardening resin **31** evenly into each concave portion **21b**.

Next, in a UV light exposing process illustrated in FIG. **12C**, the UV-hardening resin **31** is hardened by exposing UV-light **32** from above the lens substrate **11**. As a result, the shape of each concave portion **21b** for a micro lens formed in the replication mold **21'** (the substrate **21'**) for a micro lens.

Then, in a mold removing process illustrated in FIG. **12D**, when the replication mold **21'** (not shown) is peeled off from the hardened UV-hardening resin **31**, the micro lens array **12'** according to the second embodiment of the present invention is obtained. The micro lens array **12'** includes a plural of micro lenses **12a** that have been made corresponding to the concave portions **21b** for micro lenses, the micro lenses **12a** protruding from the upper surface **11a** (lower in FIG.

22

9D) of the lens substrate **11** and having no sub-lenses. The height **T** of each micro lens **12a** in the micro lens array **12'** is substantially the same as the predetermined depth **H** of the concave portion **21b** for a micro lens in the lens substrate **11**. With the above procedures, a micro lens array element **10'** is finished.

By the way, when manufacturing the micro lens array **12'** above, while the micro lens array **12** is formed integrally with the lens substrate **11**, a removable plate having a flat surface to be contacted with the UV-hardening resin can be used to press the resin instead of the lens substrate **11**. With such a plate, a micro lens array element having no lens substrate is obtained.

According to the method of manufacturing the replication mold for a micro lens array according to the second embodiment of the present invention stated above, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed to closely form a plural of concave portions **21b** on the upper surface **21a** of the substrate **21'** and then a plural of hollows **21c3** for sub-lenses that have been formed along the inner surface of each concave portion for a micro lens are etched off to disappear, the replication mold **12'** for a micro lens array in which each micro lens **12a** has no sub-lenses **12b** on the surface thereof is obtained conveniently and less costly. Moreover, since blast-grinding and etching are co-employed, the replication mold **21'** for a micro lens array is obtained at shorter times.

Additional advantages and modifications will readily occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details and representative embodiments shown and described herein. Accordingly, various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the general inventive concept as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of manufacturing a replication mold for micro lens array in which a plurality of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two-dimension and a plurality of convex sub-lenses having a smaller curvature radius than that of said micro lenses are protrusively formed on an inner surface of each micro lens, comprising steps of:

forming openings in a mask material at a predetermined spacing and width while covering an area between the openings with a mask portion after providing the mask material having a resistance to blasting on an upper surface of a substrate;

forming by blasting fine powder blast abrasive towards the mask material first concave portions for micro lens in an exposed portion of said substrate so that each first concave portion has a predetermined depth, a curvature radius, and second concave portions for sub-lens portion, having a shallower depth than that of the first concave portions and a smaller curvature radius than that of the first concave portions, along an inner surface of each first concave portion;

removing the mask material formed on the upper surface of said substrate, and

etching said substrate to cause a periphery of adjacent first concave portions to contact with each other and to form third concave portions for sub lens in each first concave portion by merging a part of the second concave portions therein.

2. A method of manufacturing a replication mold for a micro lens array in which a plurality of convexly protruded micro lenses are closely arranged in two-dimensions, comprising steps of:

23

forming openings in a mask material at a predetermined spacing and width while covering an area between the openings with a mask portion after providing the mask material having a resistance to blasting on an upper surface of a substrate; 5
forming by blasting fine powder blast abrasive towards the mask material first concave portions for micro lens in an exposed portion of said substrate so that each first concave portion has a predetermined depth, a curvature radius, and second concave portions for sub lens portion, having a shallower depth than that of the first concave portions and a smaller curvature radius than 10

24

that of the first concave portions, along an inner surface of each first concave portion;
removing the mask material formed on the upper surface of said substrate; and
etching said substrate to cause the periphery of adjacent first concave portions to contact with each other while smoothening the inner surface of each first concave portion until the second concave portions therein disappear.

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